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ABSTRACT

Tracing the background and history of Mexican Americans in Detroit, Michigan, the booklet briefly reviews the early stages of Meso-American history, the Spaniards' arrival in Mexico, colonial Mexico, Mexico's revolt for independence, and the internal turmoil in Mexico which continued until early in 1861. The accomplishments of such Mexicans as Father Miguel Hidalgo, Jose Morelos, Augustin de Iturbide, and Benito Juarez are discussed. Next, the booklet summarizes the trends of the foreign-born Mexican population of the United States between 1850 and 1977 and the correlation between deportations of Mexicans and economic trends in the United States. Three major factors which played important roles in the decisions of Mexican immigrants and migrants to come to Michigan are discussed: transfers by railroads which had employed Mexican track hands in other states; the announcement of the $5.00 work day by the Ford Motor Company and work in the automobile and related industries; and the sugar beet industry. The final section discusses the growth of Detroit's Mexican settlement; the role of fraternal, religious, cultural, and patriotic groups in the settlement; discrimination experienced by Mexicans in Detroit; and the educational and socioeconomic background of foreign-born and second-generation Mexicans in Detroit. (NQA)

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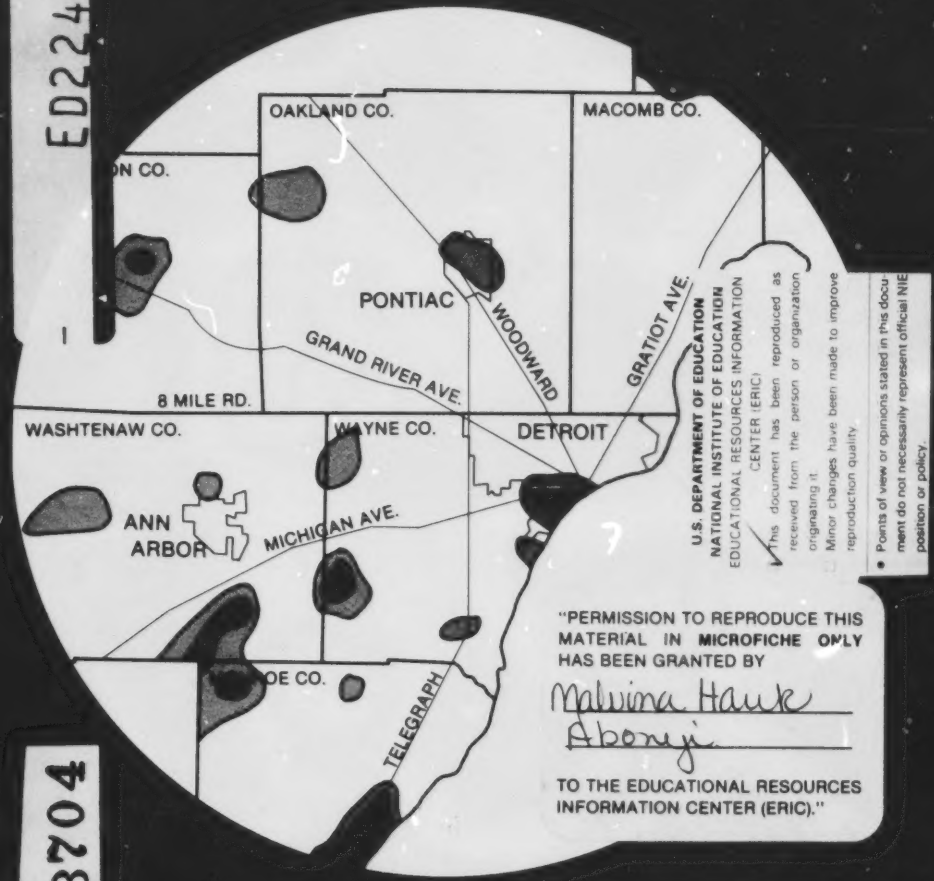
# Mexicans of Detroit

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PEOPLING OF MICHIGAN SERIES
ETHNIC STUDIES

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WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

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## "PEOPLING OF MICHIGAN" SERIES

The Center for Urban Studies of Wayne State University is pleased to have had a part in the production of publications in the "Peopling of Michigan" series. *Hungarians of Detroit* and *Mexicans of Detroit* will be followed shortly by *Ukrainians of Detroit.*

Research is progressing in the various ethnic communities of this area; future publications will depend on the availability of funds from various interested sources, including the ethnic groups themselves.

These booklets are one way of demonstrating the commitment of both the Center and the University to the urban setting which we serve and to the ethnic groups which are such an important part of our community at large.

Sue M. Smock
Acting Director
Center for Urban Studies

## EDITOR'S NOTE

The booklets which comprise the "Peopling of Michigan" series are written with the full cooperation of the ethnic communities of this area. They are designed to provide concise and accurate information about Detroit's ethnic population in a format which not only provides entertaining reading, but which can be used as a teaching adjunct in ethnic studies at all levels.

*Mexicans of Detroit* and *Ukrainians of Detroit* have been partially funded by Title IX, Ethnic Heritage Grant Number G 007802437 from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

We are grateful to HEW and to the Center for Urban Studies, Wayne State University for making it possible for us to provide these important additions to the growing field of ethnic literature.

Malvina Hauk Abonyi
Editor

## DEDICATION

To my daughter, Alexia Nicole, and to her growing knowledge and love of humanity. (M.L.B.)

To my friends in Detroit's Mexican Colonia with whom I have worked in the political arena as well as the academic community for many years. (M.H.A.)

## NOTE

In order to provide consistency, the authors use the term "Mexican" when speaking of an American resident born in Mexico, and "Mexican-American" to designate one born in the United States of Mexican born parentage. "Migrant" refers to a person who moved from one location to another within the United States, while "immigrant" identifies one who came from Mexico to this country. The terms "legal" and "illegal" aliens and/or immigrants are self-explanatory.

We have chosen to avoid the terms "Chicano" and "Latino," since they have diverse meanings in various contexts. For instance, one interesting explanation of "Chicano" was offered by a Mexican-American of the Detroit Colonia who remembers that it derived from a combination of "Mexican" and "Chicago" and was originally used to denote those Mexicans who settled in the Chicago area.

In all cases where United States Census figures are used, we remind our readers that these figures are generally considered to be a serious undercount of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the United States.

M.L.B. and M.H.A.

For information on how to participate in this series or to obtain single or multiple copies, please contact:

Ethnic Studies Division
Center for Urban Studies
5229 Cass Avenue
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Karen Rutkowski, Masters' candidate in the Department of Geography is responsible for most of the fine maps and graphs which add so much to this publication, and Terry Link gave us immeasurable assistance in compiling and checking references. James A. Anderson was responsible for the development of the Detroit Metropolitan Area Data System which provided our contour maps.

For the help of those named, as well as those who must remain nameless, we offer sincere thanks.

Marietta Lynn Baba
Malvina Hauk Abonyi

## PREFACE

One of the most interesting facets of the celebration of the United States Bicentennial was the emphasis placed on ethnicity as we moved into our third century as a nation. After many years of writing, talking, and teaching about the "melting pot," scholars, researchers, authors and politicians have come to believe what people of ethnic background have always known...that pride in one's heritage and ancestry seldom disappears and even 4th and 5th generation Americans relate to their ethnic beginnings in order to establish an identity for themselves. We are Americans, of course...but more than that, we are Polish Americans, Black Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and the rest. Pride in our ancestors and their contributions to the cultures of the world — wherever they happened to originate; and their contributions to America — whenever and however they reached these shores, is what gives us our identity, our sense of belonging. With pride in our past we can be confident in the present and make worthwhile contributions to the future.

Whether our ancestors were already in America at the time of its 'discovery' and suffered deprivation and degradation at the hands of the 'discoverers'; whether our forbears came here as prosperous landowners or as penniless indentured bond servants to make a new life in an unknown land; whether our antecedents were forcibly brought to America in the holds of slave ships; whether, at a later date, our parents or our grandparents left the shores of Asia and Europe behind in a effort to find a land of opportunity for themselves and their children; whether they illegally crossed rivers and borders to try to earn enough money to raise their families; or whether in more recent times our parents, or we ourselves, fled the newest forms of religious and political oppressions to find freedom in America...that past is what today's America is made of. We are individuals with individual backgrounds, and it is the circumstances of our ancestors and their beginnings in America, the problems they met and conquered, and the contributions they made which gives America its uniqueness in the world of nations. For America IS unique, and it is its people who make it so!

Read about the formative years of any ethnic group in America and you will find similar threads running through the fabric of their existance. Early settlers, many of them victims of political or religious persecution, braved the dangers of the unknown to settle in the "new world" where they faced untold hardships; American Indians were sought out and destroyed by military might, deprived of their lands and relegated to second class citizens; Blacks were transported here for profit and enslaved to satisfy the needs of the large landowners for workers of the land; Asian immigrants were imported to do hard labor at starvation wages and then looked down upon because of their yellow skins; Mexicans have been enticed across the border and then exploited as cheap labor on our farms and in our orchards; European immigrants were recruited to fill existing labor shortages, used to nime the coal, fire the furnacers, and man the production lines — and then ridiculed because of their alien customs and languages; recent political refugees were conpassionately admitted to this country and then regarded with suspicion because they were "taking jobs away from Americans." But somehow, although it has taken 200 years and the story is by no means complete, Americans have begun to recognize the value to this country of each of these groups, and to realize that it is the very variety of their backgrounds, heritages and experiences which have made America great among world powers and wealthy beyond imagination — not only in gross national product, but in its people.

This series of booklets will attempt, in a small way, to trace the backgrounds and histories of the ethnic groups which make up greater Detroit; to discover the contributions that each group has made to the very being of not only our city, but our national as well; to point out the many similarities which exist among these ethnic groups so that we can learn to accept and appreciate the differences; and to re-awaken a pride in the heritage of all our peoples so that we may live together in harmony and brotherhood toward our common good.

*Malvina Hauk Abonyi*

# Mexicans of Detroit

*Prelude*

Mexicans and Mexican-Americans living in the United States have inherited a proud tradition from two important cultures — the pre-conquest Meso-American Indian, and the Spanish. The history of these two cultures spans the globe as well as tens of thousands of years, and their meeting on the soil of the New World in the 16th Century would lead to the destruction of an entire civilization and the birth of an independent nation — Mexico.

Perhaps the most awesome aspect of Mexican heritage is its centuries-long foundation in the New World. The ruins at Teotihuacan near Mexico City or at Palenque in the extreme southwestern part of Mexico only hint at the vastness, complexity, and wealth of the native American empires which once flourished in these regions. Rumors of this wealth served to draw Cortes on his fateful voyage — rumors of a New World civilization embracing nearly half of Meso-America and claiming between 11 and 20 million inhabitants. The Olmec, Maya, Toltec, and Mexica-Azteca who lived here were not only separate, isolated groups of native Indio, but a chain of people whose rise and fall forged civilizations which persisted over many millenia. They erected mammoth pyramids; developed hieroglyphic writing, superior solar and lunar calendars; excelled in irrigation agriculture, complex textile weaving and metallurgy; and developed military techniques which were unsurpassed in the New World. The story of their development and accomplishments is well worth telling. Although important discoveries are still being made, and the panorama of the early stages of Meso-American history is complicated, an approx-

imate chronological pattern begins to fall into place as various authorities are consulted.
(Figure 1)

| | |
|---|---|
| 9000 B.C. | Man reaches Meso-America |
| 7500 B.C. | "Settling In" process begins |
| 2500 B.C. | Cultivation of maize, development of pottery making |
| 1500 B.C. | Pre-Classic civilization period begins |
| 1200—100 B.C. | Several minor cultures flourish and fade in Meso-America |
| 900 B.C. | Olmec culture appears in Meso-America |
| 500 B.C. | Mayan culture begins |
| 100 A.D. | Teotihuacan begins to flourish |
| 100—300 A.D. | Great Pyramids built |
| 300—900 A.D. | Golden Age of Mayan civilization |
| 850 A.D. | Teotihuacan destroyed |
| 900 A.D. | Toltec civilization appears |
| 1325 | Mexica-Aztec civilization centered at Tenochtitlan controls Valley of Mexico |
| 1519 | Spaniards arrive |
| 1521 | Mexica-Aztec Empire falls |

**Figure 1:** *Approximate Chronology of Meso-American History*

## *Early History*

Although some scientists argue that the civilizations of the South American continent were originally brought to the Western Hemisphere by Old-World peoples who crossed the Pacific by boat or raft,[1] most pre-historians and archeologists conclude that separate and distinct civilizations developed almost simultaneously in both the Old and New Worlds. The peoples of the Americas are traced to eastern Asian nomads of the Ice Age.[2] Following herds of pre-historic mammoths, mastodons[3] and musk oxen in search of food, the hunters crossed a narrow land bridge which joined Siberia with Alaska. As the herds continued to move southward, some of the nomads reached the region which now comprises Mexico and Central America.

By 7500 B.C., with the disappearance of the huge mammals, the nomads were forced to hunt smaller game like deer, rabbit, coon, and iguana and simultaneously begin their 'settl-

ing in' process. There is evidence that they harvested wild plants such as guava, cacti, and mesquite, but the great change in the life style of these early inhabitants came with the cultivation of maize which, according to historians, dates back at least as far as 2000 B.C.[4] The cultivation of this food staple along the coastal regions, in cleared jungle area, in the highlands, and most importantly, in the temperate valleys of the central plateau resulted in the settlement of the first primitive villages. Existance was no longer dependent solely on the spoils of hunting. Continual movement of people became unnecessary and life among the farmers became somewhat more peacable, although nomadic invaders still appeared with some regularity and with violent results.

About 1000 B.C., a strange people who had occupied the coastal lowland regions of Meso-America for almost 1000 years, pushed their way in among the highland farmers.[5] Called the Olmec, they had already controlled long distance networks for the trading of jade, basalt, and serpentine as well as hematite and magnetite, two important sources of iron ore. Now they extended their arts and crafts, language, and customs to the highland villages. The Olmec, called by some "The Magicians" because of their religious practices, developed rubber making and cloth weaving and employed the rites of human sacrifice to placate and attempt to control the forces of nature which were so important to their existance.

Reconstruction of the Meso-America of the last millenium B.C. shows evidence of warfare between communities, of periods of long drought, of people being overrun and enslaved. Athough the Olmec as a people, were either absorbed into other cultures or simply vanished, they left behind a distinctive cultural imprint on Meso-America through their sophisticated stonework, surrealistic art, and their belief that man could control the forces of nature with magical rites.[6] By the first century, A.D., new centers of culture were established and new groups of peoples continued to emerge on various sites in the region, heralding the Golden Age of Mexico's early development.

The Maya, Tolteca, Mexica, Totonaca, and Mixtec were among the separate peoples who made their contributions to the creation of the final, great civilization which was to be Mexico.

Although they flourished in various sites at different times, it was the blend of these cultures which created a nation. (Figure 2)

**Figure 2:** *Selected Ethnic Settlements in Early Mexico*

One of the greatest early sites was at Teotihuacan, some thirty miles northeast of today's Mexico City. Four miles long and two miles wide, Teotihuacan was a vast ceremonial center boasting of extraordinary architectural refinement and artistry. It was home to some 30,000 inhabitants who built a complicated system of underground drains, viaducts, roads, and bridges and who controlled a vast territory of about 10,000 square miles.[7]

The magnificence of this civilization is only hinted at in the ruins which have been uncovered to date, including the Pyramid of the Sun, the second largest monument ever built in Mexico which contained a million cubic yards of earth and stone. With a base measuring seven hundred feet, the pyramid rose over two hundred feet into the sky and is an awe-inspiring sight among ruins which are still being uncovered.

About the same time that the Olmec disappeared from prominence, a civilization even richer than that at Teotihuacan was being developed by the Maya, who built a chain of city-states which controlled not only the Yucatan Peninsula and the territory covered by the states of Campeche, Tabasco, and Chiapas, but parts of today's Central America as far south as Nicaragua. Theirs was the only culture of pre-Colombian

America which developed a glyph-written language capable of recording events. Among their other major achievements during the period which lasted from about 300 to 900 A.D., were magnificent cities nestled in the jungle, billiant frescos which adorned their walls, the development of three calendars, an extensive network of roads, and a numbering system which first introduced the concept of zero, thus surpassing even the Greek, Egyptian, and Roman mathematical systems.[8] (Figure 3)

**Figure 3:** *Site of the Mayan Civilization*

Suddenly, in the 9th century, Teotihuacan was destroyed, presaging a rather rapid disappearance of the classic era in Mexico. Although there is botanical and geological evidence of severe and prolonged drought, it is difficult to piece together concrete evidence of what actually took place.

It is noted, however, that a major expedition of Toltecs appeared to establish their capitol at Tula, called the "second Rome of Amerindian Mexico."[9] Led by the legendary "Plumed Serpent," Quetzalcoatl, they fortified their northern borders against invasion by the Chichimeca who were hunters and warriors from Northern Mexico. The Toltec traded to the south and east in jade, cacao, and feathers which were important com-

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modities of the time, and conquered settlements which lay in their path, exacting tribute from the vanquished peoples.

Once again, however, the pattern set by preceding cultures prevailed, and within a few hundred years, the Toltec Empire disintegrated as waves of Chichimeca poured into the central portion of Mexico. (Figure 4)

**Figure 4:** *Movement of Early Mexican Cultures*

Divided among themselves into various tribes, the invaders competed with each other for land and to raise impressive pyramids and palaces, a competition which soon led to out and out warfare and to the ultimate destruction of their unified settlement.

Many historians suggest also that the decline of each of these cultures was rooted in climatic changes which caused severe droughts.[10] Since the economic base of each settlement was agricultural, irrigation was vital and each succeeding civilization was forced to develop and maintain a complex system of bridges, aquaducts, and irrigation canals for watering huge tracts of land. In times of severe drought, people were forced to abandon the great population centers and return to

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the nomadic existance of their ancestors in search of food. These wanderings inevitably brought them into contact with real or potential enemies, and in the ensuing competition for scarce resources, warfare was inevitable.

Thus was established the Meso-American pattern of culture following culture — civilization following civilization, particularly in the region of the Valley of Mexico. (Figure 5)

**Figure 5:** *Region of the Valley of Mexico*

Finally, however, it was one of the groups of Chichimeca wanderers from the northwest which was to give the land its modern name. Their origins buried in time and legend, the Mexica (called also the Aztec after their language) settled in caves and huts in the swamps of Texcoco, trading the fish and wildfowl they caught for wood and stone with which to build their floating settlements. Meanwhile, Mexica-Aztec warriors steadily and relentlessly extended their domain in all directions, carrying with them their sign which depicted an eagle sitting on a cactus, devouring a serpent. Attracted by prosperity, artisans and merchants from all sides settled in the region, causing the initial settlement site to grow ever larger and more beautiful



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In 1440,the first Aztec ruler to deserve the appellation "Emperor," Moctezuma (Montezuma) ascended the throne of an empire centered in Tenochtitlan, the site of today's Mexico City. He and three successors continued the wars of expansion without interruption until 1502 when the throne was occupied by Moctezuma II, an experienced soldier and administrator.

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Mexica-Aztec Empire was at the apex of its power, held together by an unquestioned religious discipline as well as a military and administrative machine of extraordinary efficiency. An extremely wealthy empire with a strong merchant-middle class, there were no signs of economic weakness. Tenochtitlan (The Place of the Cactus on a Stone) housed probably a million people by this time, about the same as the population of Mexico City would be almost 500 years later.[11] The palace of the Emperor stood on the site where today stands the National Palace, and the shores of the lake were dotted with townships of solid stone houses, surrounded by smaller villages of adobe and thatch dwellings set among vast fields of maize.

**Figure 6:** *Mexica-Aztec Empire, circa 1519*



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But unfortunately, Aztec society was no longer egalitarian. Expansionism had stimulated the growth of a government of domination and a class structure evolved with a heirarchy made up of administrators, warriors, and priests.[12]

By 1519, The Mexica-Azteca Empire extended from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean, and from the Gulf of Tehuantepec on the south to San Luis Potosi on the north. (Figure 6) The ruler and the people of this prosperous and flourishing sovereignty were unaware of threatening outside forces.

*The Spaniards Arrive*

Since Columbus had made his epic voyage in 1492, many expeditions to the New World had followed and Spain had established plantation colonies on Cuba, Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic), Puerto Rico, and Jamaica — colonies whose existance depended on slave labor. In 1517, a Spanish galleon sailed from Cuba in search of new source of slaves and was blown off course into the coast of Yucatan in southeastern Mexico.

This first meeting of Spaniards and Mexican natives was brief and stormy with most of the invaders being killed and the remainder sailing back to Cuba in defeat.[13] Close on their heels, yet another expedition landed in Yucatan and again met the same fierce opposition. This time, however, the survivors, instead of returning to Cuba, pressed on to the latitude of Veracruz.[14]

Here, they were greeted by hospitable Indians who prepared feasts and presented their visitors with gold.[15] Messengers were also dispatched to the Emperor to announce the arrival of the strange men who, in the meantime, decided to return to Cuba.

The Governor of Cuba, fired by reports of slaves and gold brought to him by the returning Spaniards, began a search for someone to lead yet another expedition and chose Don Hernando Cortes de Montroy, a popular and successful owner of a Cuban sugar plantation which was always in need of both commodities. Despite some after thoughts by Governor Velasquez, who sensed Cortes' personal ambitions too late, a force of 550 fighting men, sixteen horses, ten brass cannon, and arms of iron set sail in eleven small ships for the Yucatan coast on February 19, 1519.[16] Cortes was prepared to conquer any people he encountered for himself, the glory of God, and for gold. Striking down native idols and erecting crosses as they went, the expeditionaries proceeded along the coast to Tabasco. (Figure 7)

**Figure 7:** *Cortes' Route, 1519*

It was here that Cortes finally met with open hostility. But the combination of Spanish artillery and horses proved too much for the natives who were convinced that the invaders were

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supernatural beings — half men and half animal. The introduction of the horse to Meso-America figured promiently in the success of the invasion by the Spaniards.[17] On April 21, 1519, Cortes reached Veracruz. Word of his arrival was carried swiftly to Moctezuma who, believing that the visitor might be the god Quetzalcoatl returning as promised, dispatched a welcoming party bearing costly gifts.

Cortes, meanwhile, in order to circumvent any future claims to territory by the Governor of Cuba, had claimed Veracruz in the name of the King of Spain and dispatched a ship directly to Spain to inform his monarch. Once this was done, Cortes began his inland march to Tenochtitlan and Moctezuma, first burning his fleet to prevent his followers from deserting.

Ever mindful of the ancient prophecies of the 'return of the white god,' the Emperor greeted Cortes with dignity and courtesy, not realizing the Spaniard's determination to use Moctezuma only as a puppet to achieve domination over the people. (Figure 8)

**Figure 8:** *Moctezuma and Cortes Meet.*

Before the end of the year 1519, Cortes was the real ruler of Mexico, with Moctezuma seemingly resigned to his fate.[18] Meanwhile, the emissary which Cortes had earlier dispatched to Spain to inform the King of their conquest, had returned to Veracruz with a fleet of eighteen ships. As soon as he heard of this expedition, Cortes left Tenochtitlan to intercept it and gain control of the more than 1000 men who were plentifully supplied with horses and weapons. While Cortes was thus occupied, the eighty men he had left behind to control Moctezuma's capitol city were beset by the natives. The Spanish garrison survived, however, until Cortes returned to join in the fray.[19] Fierce fighting ensued in which thousand of natives perished before the cannons and cross-bows of the Spaniards. Moctezuma was deposed and forced to appear on the battlements to beg for peace. Severely wounded in a shower of arrows, the once great Emperor of the Aztecs died.

Although Cortes was forced to flee, followed closely by the remnants of the Aztec army, the tide turned after several minor skirmishes and on August 13, 1521, the Aztec Empire fell to the Spanish conquistadores. Cortes named the subjugated territory New Spain, and central Mexico was under the rule of the Spanish king.[20]

The Mexicanos, as the Spaniards called them, had paid a high price for their resistance. Hundreds of thousands of their people had been killed, their lands overrun, their women raped, and their possessions confiscated. To add to their trauma, Cortes ordered Tenochtitlan evacuated and razed, formally signalling the end of a once great empire and the destruction of a way of life which was never to return again.

## *Colonial Mexico*

While his subordinates busied themselves extending the colonial boundaries to the west and south, Cortes made the decision to build his new capitol, Mexico City, on the ruins of Tenochtitlan.[21] Rewarding his faithful followers with vast land grants, Cortes established the Spanish system of "encomienda" on Mexican soil for the first time. Selected colonists, "encomenderos," were allowed to exact tribute from the natives,

purportedly in return for teaching them about Christianity and supplying them with the basic necessities of life. In reality, the system served to establish the invaders as a wealthy, socially elite caste totally supported by the labor of the native Indios who were bound to the land by their masters and who rapidly diminished in numbers.

Besides bringing the first horses to Mexico, the Spaniards introduced sheep, swine, chickens, various fruits, and sugar as well as wheaten bread, wines, and beef. The native agricultural system was revolutionized by the use of work animals and the wooden plow. Hundreds of rootless Spaniards left their homeland to pour into New Spain and they imported yet another commodity — disease! Like the natives of North America, the Meso-American Indian had no natural immunity to virus diseases such as smallpox, measles, and influenza. In 1545 alone, 800 thousand natives died of these and similar illnesses. Of the 11 million Indios in Mexico at the time of Cortes landing, only 1 million remained less than 150 years later.[22]

As the number of natives continued to dwindle, the system of "repartimiento" was introduced by which the colonists were granted the right to exact labor from the Indians. Eventually, "encomienda" and "repartimiento" came to mean one thing — the Spanish crown used the depleted native population as slave labor in the silver mines and on the large agricultural tracts owned exclusively by Spaniards.[23]

Huge estates, called "Haciendas" had been created by the government by forcibly seizing Indian lands. Thus, Indian serfdom was merely reconstructed and reinforced. A system of debt peonage was introduced whereby "Hacendados" (Spanish owners of large estates) advanced loans to the natives, extracting payment in the form of labor. Debts were passed on from generation to generation, thus providing a constant source of labor. Since no Indio could ever repay the debt, this was slavery in everything but name.[24] Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the debts were further extended by forcing the Indians to purchase goods from Spain, which also served to hasten their adoption of Spanish culture and customs.

During these early years, the economy of the mother country, Spain, grew increasingly unstable.[25] Ironically, one of the major forces contributing to this instability was the silver pro-

duced by Mexico's more than 5000 mines which stretched from Sonoro to Guerrero.[28] (Figure 9)

**Figure: 9** *Sites of Mexican Silver Deposits*

It was the silver which provided the means for financing Spain's endless and unprofitable wars. Severe inflation in the old country resulted, and much of the silver mined in the New World went to repay Spanish debts to England and Holland. In effect, Mexico's silver financed the colonization efforts of the Dutch and English in Africa, Asia and the Americas, laying the foundation for future problem areas. The dangers of mining the silver demanded an unbelievable toll of human lives, and the Spanish were forced to push ever northward to seek new sources of labor, decimating the native population as they went.

Another far-reaching effect on the future of Mexico was caused by the fact that the conquistadores brought no women on their original voyage and few European ladies dared or cared to make the dangerous trip even at a later date. Cortes, determined to build an empire, insisted his men marry, so they took native wives.

The children of these unions were called "Mestizos" and although they were not serfs, they were not part of the land-



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**Figure 11:** *Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla* [30]

The call spread and within a matter of weeks, tens of thousands had joined the liberating army on its march toward the capitol city, defeating Spanish garrisons in their path. However, when the revolutionaries finally came within sight of their goal, Hidalgo halted his advancing army. Some historians believe he was unwilling to bear the responsibility for the sack of Mexico City.[31] For whatever reason, the hesitation cost Hidalgo not only victory, but eventually, his life in front of a firing squad. The battle was lost, but the "Grito de Dolores," the Cry of Independence continued to ring in the ears of the common people and the seeds of revolution continued to grow. Father Hidalgo can rightly be considered the forefather of Mexico's political philosophy and the social movement which led to the revolution of 1910.

After Hidalgo's defeat, guerrilla actions continued under various leaders of whom Jose Morelos was one of the most capable. A village priest also, and a Mestizo, Morelos with his rebels took Orizaba, Oaxaca, and finally, Acapulco, posing a serious threat to the government's ties with the Gulf states. In September, 1813, Morelo called a conference of rebel delegates

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to reveal his plans for an independent Mexico — plans which included the establishment of a republic; universal suffrage without regard to race or caste; the abolition of special privileges to clerical hierarchy; and the breaking up of the great estates belonging to private landowners and the Church.[32]

Conservative reactions were immediate and strong. The privileged were being threated! Even though many of the upper class wanted the independence of Mexico, they were not prepared to make the sacrifices of land and fortune which it would have demanded of them.

One reactionary was Augustin de Iturbide, a deposed former army officer of great personal ambition who opposed the more radical ideals of Hidalgo and Morelos, but who succeeded in persuading Vicente Guerrero, one of Morelos' most active lieutenants to join with his cause. In February of 1821, Iturbide announced his Plan of Iguala based on 'three guarantees:' 1) Mexico was to be an independent kingdom ruled by Ferdinand VII or another suitable European prince; 2) Roman Catholicism was to be the only recognized religion and the Church was to retain all its privileges; and 3) all Mexicans were to be free and equal, regardless of their racial origin. The plan also provided that there would be no interference with existing property rights, thereby insuring its appeal to the large landowners.[33] Despite the misgivings of radical revolutionaries, Iturbide's plan met with almost universal enthusiasm.

Under a new flag of green, white, and red, Iturbide led a triumphant army into Mexico City. But his triumph was short lived. After a decade of civil war, Iturbide ruled over a technically free but economically ruined country of flooded silver mines, idle haciendas, an empty national treasury, and a huge army waiting to be paid.

Liberals on one hand were eager to declare a republic; some conservatives, on the other, were still scheming to restore Spanish rule. In the midst of the turmoil, Iturbide had himself crowned on May 18, 1822, as Augustin I, Emperor of Mexico.[34] It took less than a year for inflation, jealousies, and intrigue to force the new Emperor to abdicate. His brief rule, however, served to consolidate dissident army officers including Vicente Guerrero and a new figure, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna who was to play a part in Mexican politics for some thirty years.[35]

The various factions of the populace continued to differ on how to rule their land, and the first thirty years of the Republic

owning aristocracy of their fathers. By 1650, there were 160,000 Mestizos in New Spain, already outnumbering the Spaniards and laying the groundwork for what was to become the largest and most revolutionary class in Mexico — a class which was to reshape the country and its future!

Soon, missionaries arrived from Spain and conversion of the natives met with little resistance.

Late in 1531, an event occurred which hastened the Catholicization of Mexico. In that year, on a hill at Tepeyac, just northwest of Mexico City, the Virgin Mary appeared to an Indian peasant, Juan Diego, leaving the imprint of her image on his cloak. During the next fifteen years, over 9 million Mexicans were baptized in the faith and in 1754, the Virgin of Guadalupe was declared the Patroness and Protectress of New Spain by Papal Bull. Today, the Basilica of Guadalupe, about three miles from the Cathedral of Mexico City draws hundreds of thousands of the faithful on pilgrimages each year.[27] (Figure 10)

**Figure 10:** *The Virgin of Guadalupe* [28]

Early in the 16th century, a complex and rigid caste system became clearly delineated in Mexico. With Spanish culture

centered in the cities and large towns, the administration of the government was in the hands of a few Spanish landowners and the clergy. Deliberate marriage alliances between land-owning families continued to increase the size of estates owned by the Spanish aristocracy who comprised the social elite.

Next in line were the "Criollos" who had been born in Mexico of Spanish parents; however, they were denied the right to hold public office and to attain higher education. The "Mestizos," of mixed Spanish-Indian parentage were thus relegated to third class citizenship while the rapidly disappearing native Indio remained at the bottom of the social ladder. This caste system was one of the many seeds of discontent sown in New Spain by its conquerors.

Meanwhile, Spain itself was economically backward, socially stagnant, and over-bureaucratized.[29] Inflation was rampant, and the long period of war which had put the French Bourbons on the throne of Spain had further weakened the mother country. In 1767, the Spanish Crown, feeling the repercussions of events in Europe, expelled the Jesuit missionaries from New Spain, a move which was highly resented by all classes of Mexicans who knew that their educational standards had been irreparably damaged by the expulsion of their teachers.

A growing sense of indignation and dissatisfaction pervaded Mexico and the idea of Mexican independence from Spain began to be timidly aired. Then, in 1776, the success of the American Revolution against British rule served to add fuel to the feelings that, sooner or later, Spanish America would follow the example set by the thirteen colonies.

However, it remained for an obscure priest from a little country town, backed by a band of Mestizos and Indios to launch the first real challenge against Spanish rule of Mexico.

## *The Cry for Independence*

The revolt began on the 16th of September, 1810 in the little town of Dolores near San Miguel, when Father Miguel Hidalgo, a Criollo parish priest, called for the independence of Mexico in a fervent speech to his parishioners. (Figure 11)

were marred by ineffective leadership, internal decline, and a failure to deal realistically with international relations, particularly in the western hemisphere.[36]

At the same time, North Americans, dreaming of a powerful and expanding new nation, were being drawn westward into land occupied by Amerindians. Although the United States had recognized Mexican sovereignty over the Texas Territory via a treaty in 1819, the two countries were natural rivals, culturally as well as geographically and relations between the newly independent Mexico and the United States were correct but uneasy.

In order to induce settlement of its northernmost regions, the Mexican government had offered its people free land and tax incentives; unfortunately for the future of Mexico, the educated elite were not interested in moving to the comparatively wild lands and many of the poor were unable to do so.[37] Thus, the void, particularly above the Rio Grande became filled with North American settlers who arrived with tools, machinery, and Negro slaves. The relatively few Mestizos who had been tempted to move northward from the Valley of Mexico tended to establish themselves south of the Rio Grande.[38] (Figure 12)

**Figure 12:** *Border area, 1819*

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North of the border, a vision of a United States stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific kept growing. Plantation owners of the southern states with their land depleted by intensive planting of cotton and other crops, looked longingly at the Texas Territory which, with slave labor, they could develop into crop-producing lands and where they could herd their sheep and cattle.[39]

Alarmed by the purchase of the Louisiana Territory by the United States, Mexico repulsed an offer by the American government to purchase the Texas Territories. Mexicans were beginning to sense that the North American presence within their boundaries formed a serious threat. A series of pronouncements by the Mexican government and ensuing skirmishes sparked a rebellion which ended in the establishment of the Independent Republic of Texas in 1836. The new Republic immediately became an issue in the slavery question, a serious problem which was already creating tensions between the northern and southern states of the United States.

Southern politicians, eager to enlist yet another pro-slave state, began lobbying for the annexation of Texas, a move which finally took place in 1845. James Polk, who had run for the presidency of the United State primarily on a platform of gaining the Texas and California Territories, and who saw that Mexico was torn by internal strife and mounting financial difficulties, determined that the time was ripe for action on the part of the United States. Polk prepared to negotiate for the two territories on a financial basis, but when his offer was repulsed by the Mexican government, he immediately made preparations to provoke war to achieve his goals.[40] Zachary Taylor was dispatched to build and defend a small fort on the Rio Grande in full sight of the Mexicans who held the other side of the river. The inevitable clash between the two countries occurred in April, 1846. With only slight opposition from anti-slavery Americans, the United States declared war and American troops were dispatched to the western territories and Mexico. Disciplined American volunteers with superior equipment faced conscripted Mexicans. Leadership on both sides was less than brilliant and it was in the field that the war was waged. Handicapped by at least three political upheavals within the country, the Mexican armies were finally defeated in this war which Mexicans call the "War of Intervention." Under the treaty of

Guadalupe Hidalgo which was signed in March of 1848, Mexico surrendered over half its territory to the United States in exchange for 15 million dollars and the cancellation of American claims for debts owed.

Thus, Texas, California, and the New Mexico Territory became part of the United States. (Figure 13)

**Figure 13:** *U.S.—Mexico Border, Treaty of 1848*

Thousands of Mexicans had fought bravely and died, but in vain. A brilliant young Mexican senator of the day, Mariano Otero, blamed Mexico's loss on the disunity prevalent in the country. He felt that the classes—Indio, Mestizo, and Criollo, as well as the special interest groups — the army, the church, and the bureaucracy — were too antagonistic toward one another to unite long enough to repel the invader. He wrote: "There is no national spirit because we are not a nation."[41]



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*The Struggle Continues*

The internal turmoil in Mexico continued even as the face of Mexico changed. Persons of Spanish birth had all but disappeared and Criollos (those born in Mexico of Spanish parentage) were rapidly being outnumbered by Mestizos (those born of mixed Indio-Spanish parentage). These were the people who would eventually determine the fate of the nation.

At the same time, a new breed of public servant was becoming evident in the provinces. One such was Benito Juarez, a Zapotec Indio who had been educated despite his lowly birth and who had married into a Criollo family. (Figure 14)

**Figure 14:** *Benito Juarez*[42]

Juarez was typical of the younger intellectuals who were impatient with conditions in their country. Their rallying point became an attack against the wealth, privileges, and power of the Church which they believed were preventing Mexico's entrance into the progressive, 19th century world around it. Mexico became embroiled in an on-going guerrilla civil war, the path of which is difficult to follow, but in which the figure of Juarez

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assumes prominent proportions. In 1859, under his "Laws of Reform," all Church property reverted to the government; however, in desperate need of cash, the government quickly sold the properties, and most of the land passed into the hands of speculators, foreigners, and the ultra-conservative 'hacendados.'

Internal fighting continued until early in 1861, when Juarez entered Mexico City in victory and, despite the destruction caused by the civil war, hope once again raised it weary head.

One thing was certain! The real Mexican nationality had manifested itself. La Raza! Never again would the Mestizo majority of Mexico willingly accept the imposition of European rule. However, the precarious financial position of the country forced Juarez in 1861 to declare a two year moratorium on all international debts — a move which was to have tragic repercussions. Mexico's defaults on her debts to France gave Napoleon III the excuse he had been seeking to fulfill his dream of creating a French Empire in Middle America.[43] Abetted, then abandoned by the Spanish and British, the French engaged in combat with the Mexicans. After numerous encounters, in the spring of 1862, French forces met the Mexicans at Puebla. Led by Ignacio Zaragoza who rallied his troops with the cry: "You are the first sons of Mexico. They have come to take your country from you!"[44] Mexican defenders routed the French on the 5th day of May (Cinco de Mayo), a date forever honored in the annals of the Mexican nation.[45]

The enraged Napoleon then ordered a full army corps to Mexico, and on June 10, 1863, the French marched into Mexico City, forcing President Juarez and his cabinet to flee. With the help of conservative Mexican elitists, the French created an assembly which abolished the fledgling Mexican Republic and formed a new Mexican Empire with Austrian Archduke Maximilian as Emperor. Napoleon was the real power behind the throne and more than 20,000 French troops occupied Mexican soil — troops which had to be supported by the Mexicans, further aggravating the country's already precarious financial situation. Time and other factors, principally the continued guerrilla activities of Juarez and his followers, finally resulted in the fall of the monarchy on May 15, 1867 and in Maximilian's execution. Juarez returned to lead Mexico once again and was re-elected to another four year term in 1871. His death in 1872, however, cut short the career of this man who had helped to

forge a nation, defeated an invading army, and most importantly, nurtured the seeds of liberation and freedom in Mexico.

Presided over in turn by Benito Juarez, Porfirio Diaz, and Sebastian Lerdo, the Mexican nation underwent a period of development and nation-building from 1867 to 1910. Liberals tend to view it as a time of regression and frustration for the Mexican people; conservatives see it as a period of stability, peace, and progess. History must decide, but there is no doubt that Mexico's greatest problem, its caste system, had not been dealt with.[46]

Instead of a desperately needed land reform which would have helped the Indios and Mestizos of the country, Diaz had allowed the sale of huge tracts of land to foreign companies and to already wealthy hacendados. Thousands of Mexican peasants who had farmed their land for generations were now forcibly dispossessed and forced to work for the landowners at menial wages.[47] Villages were deprived of water rights and estates continued to grow larger. In Morelos alone, virtually all of the croplands were owned by only 32 families.[48]

Thus, the foundations for future unrest were laid and further revolution was inevitable.

With more than half the land in Mexico belonging to a few families and foreign owners, the peasant worked eternally in debt — debts which continued to be passed on from father to son. But the Mexican could not be completely dehumanized or totally defeated. He survived and his numbers grew!

In 1910, the approximately 1 million Mexicans of pure European blood were outnumbered by 8 million Mestizos and 6 million who were still considered Amerindians.[49] Thus, 10 percent of the population controlled the land, dominated the professions, and administered the government. On the haciendas, it was a time of glory. In the mines, factories, and fields, it was hell. And the common people fought back.

The years of struggle from 1910 to 1920 comprised a unique revolution. The uprising was not a short episode of violence followed by immediate change, but rather a continuous process of reform. The revolution developed in varying degrees of intensity and by 1913, the leadership of the rebel forces was in the hands of men whose roots were no longer European or Amerindian, but Mexican. These were the true representatives of La Raza (The Race) whose similarity in language, religion,

customs, and color had been created from the mixture of the native Indio and the invading Spaniard. Now at last, Mexicans came into their own under the leadership of men like Villa, Zapata, and Obregon. Victory was the people's. But victory was costly. During the revolutionary period, as many as two million Mexicans were killed and more than 260,000 fled to Texas, with 25,000 going to San Antonio alone.[50]

In addition to the revolution itself, various conditions and events on both sides of the border have had their impact on the out-migration of the people of Mexico. It remains now to examine these happenings and to discover how they affected the movement of Mexicans to the United States and their lives once they arrived.

## *The Movement of Mexicans to the United States*

Before the treaty of Guadalupe in 1848, Mexican shepherds and farm workers had travelled freely back and forth across the border. The new international boundary did not prove much of a deterrant to this traffic. Before 1900, the Mexican border crosser was not considered an immigrant by either government or by himself.[51] It has been estimated that the Mexican population of the American border states increased by more than 65% between 1880 and 1900. (Figure 15)

**Figure 15:** *Mexican population of United States Border States, 1900* [52]



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Grazing lands and temporary work were not the only enticements which lured Mexicans northward. Industrial and agricultural expansion in the United States had created a demand for workers which could not be met by the northern labor market. Immigration from Asia had been curtailed by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 [53] and the Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan in 1907 [54]. To replace the workers who had traditionally done the menial jobs, the United States not only overlooked illegal border crossings, but enacted legislation in 1917 to waive the literacy test and the $8.00 head tax for Mexicans who wished to enter. Mexico's labor proved to be vital to the continued growth of American railroads, mines, and foundries as well as agricultural areas. [55]

Conditions inside Mexico itself also contributed to the restlessness of its people. During the last decades of the 19th century, the population of Mexico had increased by 6 million; yet much of the tillable land was still in the hands of a few landowners. Political instability also served to increase the flow of emigrants northward at a rapid rate. While statistics are not available for undocumented entries, census figures on legal immigrants illustrate the upward trend during the last decades of the 19th century. (Figure 16)

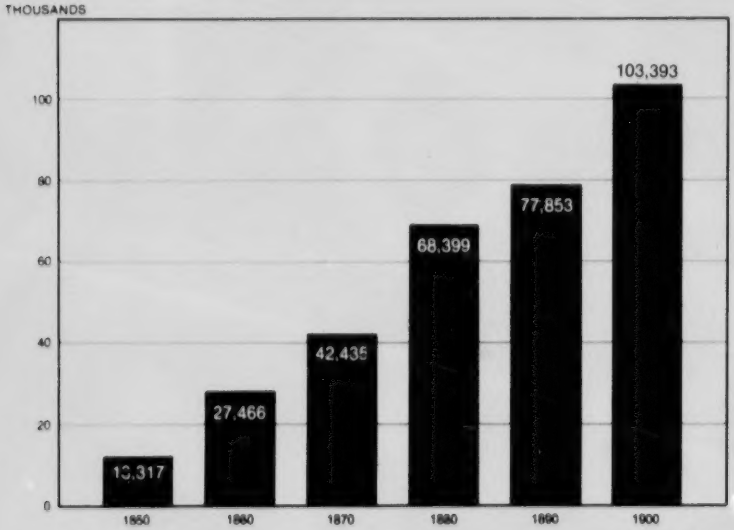


**Figure 16:** *Foreign Born Mexican Population of the United States, 1850-1900* [56]

The trend continued, and even without taking into account the transient Mexicans, the foreign born Mexican population in this country more than doubled in the first decade of the 20th century and continued on the rise. (Figure 17)

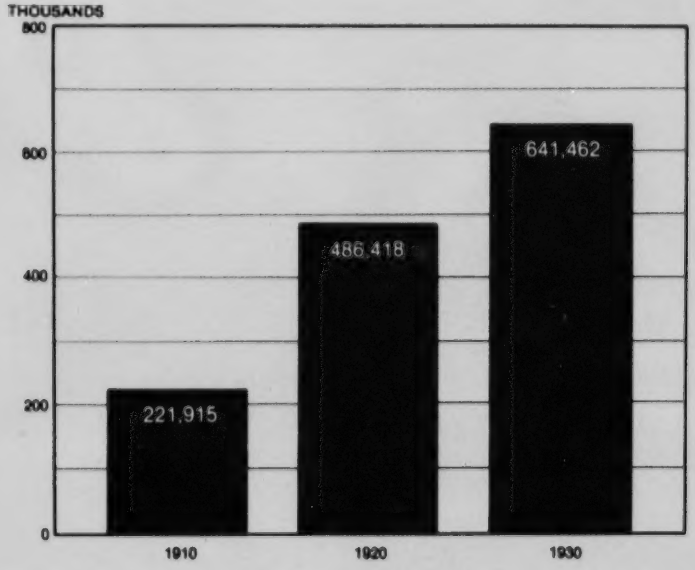


**Figure 17:** *Foreign Born Mexican Population of the United States, 1910-1930* [57]

Shortly after the beginning of the century, two major events occurred to influence yet greater numbers to leave Mexico for the United States — the Mexican Revolution in 1910 and World War I which began in 1914. The first event with its resultant bloodshed and political ramifications, stimulated the outmigration of not only poor peasants, but of middle and upper class Mexicans. The second event cut off European immigration to the United States and created an even greater need for a source of cheap labor. By 1920, the Mexican born population of the United States had again more than doubled over the previous decade.

In addition to these political crises which propelled so many Mexicans northward, the hugh disparity in earnable wages between the two countries also served to accelerate the phenomenon.

In 1926, for example, according to official Mexican sources, a family of five in the central and northern plateau regions of Mexico needed about 288 pesos ($144) per month to survive at a bare existance level. The average worker, however, was paid only about 1.15 pesos per day, which for a 31 day month gave him an income of 35.65 pesos, worth about $17.50 in United States dollars. Thus, the average Mexican peasant was earning less than 1/8 of the amount necessary merely to exist.[58]

At the same time, common laborers in the United States averaged $1.75 per day in the Texas cotton fields, up to $6.00 per day in the vineyards of California; almost $5.00 in the Arizona mines; $4.00 for California brick kiln workers; and up to $4.75 on the railroads.[59] Despite the fact that Mexicans were invariably paid less than their American counterparts, by 1926, the average of all reported wages paid to Mexican laborers in the United States was $3.38 per day, or almost $105 per month — six times what the same worker could hope to earn in his homeland.

During these years, in addition to the peasants, some skilled workers as well as middle and upper middle class Mexicans were also crossing the border. However, because of language problems and employer discrimination, most of these were also forced to begin with non-skilled jobs.

Altogether, migration, both legal and illegal, was so high that young, able-bodied men virtually disappeared from some towns and villages, particularly in the 'mesa central' (central plateau) states of Mexico with lesser, but still important numbers coming from the 'mesa del norte' (northern plateau) states.[60] (Figure 18)

**Figure 18:** *Central and Northern Plateau States of Mexico*

During the thirteen years between the end of World War I and the Depression, more than a half million Mexicans legally immigrated to the United States.[61] They continued to settle mostly in the southwestern states, joining those Mexicans who had been living in this area even before it had been annexed by the United States. Later, driven by increasingly harsh economic conditions, these were the people who traveled the route northward which eventually led to the Great Lakes region and Michigan.

The great numbers of these immigrants created a vast labor pool which worked to the advantage of employers. In the early years of the 20th century, Mexican workers consistently earned less than their American counterparts and were frequently used as strike-breakers.[62]



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Despite the fact that they were almost always taken advantage of by their employers and remained at the bottom of the wage scale, early Mexican immigrants were still able to maintain a reasonable life style here, with enough left over to send money back to their families in Mexico. In the nine years from 1919 to 1927, for instance, more than $5 million per year was sent to Mexico via postal money orders alone.[63] Most of the money was intended to buy land, since the majority of the Mexicans had little or no desire to establish permanent residence in the United States.

Even those who entered as legal immigrants and thus became permanent residents, returned to their homes in Mexico at regular intervals and there were large numbers, generally not counted in any census, who crossed the border several times each year in response to seasonable demands for workers.

From the original settlement sites in the border states, the dispersal of Mexican immigrants occurred in a pattern which extended in a northeasterly direction toward the Great Lakes, following closely the regional economic development pattern of the United States.[64]

As an area became prosperous and jobs became plentiful, the flow of Mexican immigrants and migrants to that area became evident. Large numbers of them were railroad workers who, as they following the expanding routes of the railroads, were gradually absorbed into the coal and ore mines, the smelting and refining plants, and other industries along the way.

But it was especially the jobs in the citrus fruit, sugar beet, winter vegetable, and cotton growing areas of the United States which scattered Mexicans across the United States and ultimately resulted in their entry into the manufacturing plants of the northern states.[65] Generally, they followed a migratory route along which they moved to harvest truck crops in the southwest in the late winter and early spring, to pick cotton in the south in the summer months, and then to harvest sugar beets and fruit in the great plains states and midwest later in the season. (Figure 19)

**Figure 19:** *Migratory Route of Many Mexican Immigrants and Migrants*

Gradually, permanent Mexican settlements began to develop along this route as farm workers moved into higher paying jobs on stock ranches, meat packing plants, and in the iron, cement, and automobile factories of the various states.[66]

During the early years of the 20th century, economic factors in the United States fluctuated and, although Mexicans had made tremendous contributions to the growth of agriculture, the railroads, and industry of this country, a downswing in America's economic picture made Mexican immigrants less desirable. When jobs were plentiful and American workers were able to be selective about performing the more menial labor, Mexicans were often actively recruited to work in this country and frequently transported illegally to fields and mines by greedy employers with the government conveniently 'looking the other way.' However, when the economy of the United States showed signs of slumping and jobs began to become scarce, these same workers fell victim to criticism and harassment.[67] During periods of recession, state and federal legislation was frequently introduced to step up illegal alien apprehension programs and to establish penalities for employers of undocumented workers, mostly Mexicans.

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Although available deportation statistics cannot be regarded as completely accurate, a look at trends will serve to point out the correlation between deportations of Mexicans and economic trends in the United States. (Figure 20)

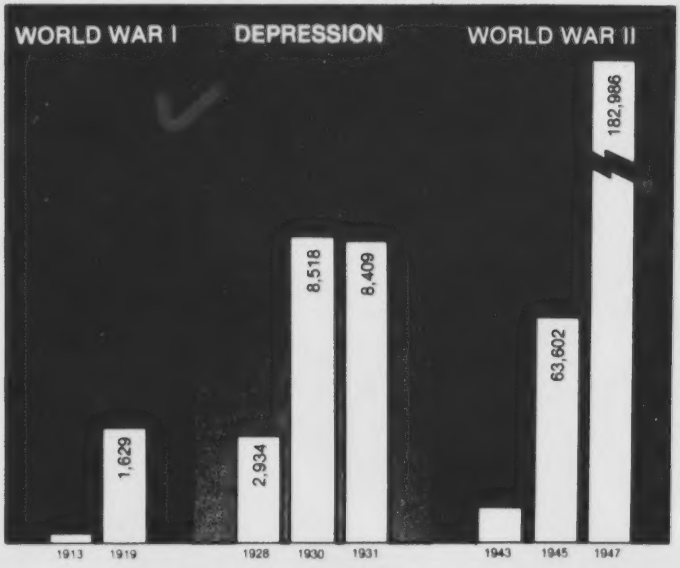


**Figure 20:** *Deportation of Mexican Nationals for Selected Years* [68]

When World War I put a stop to European immigration and burgeoning industry created a demand for workers, Mexican immigrants were welcomed, and deportations dropped to a low. However, in 1919, with the war ended, deportations accelerated and repatriation programs were also introduced. In 1921, for instance, the Mexican government spent some two and a half million dollars to transport stranded Mexican workers back to their villages and towns. United States industries joined in the program, with the Ford Motor Company repatriating over 3,000 Mexicans at company expense.[69]

From the end of World War I until 1928, deportations remained comparatively stable, even though many more Mexicans were entering this country. Statistics for the Depression years of 1931 and 1932, however reflect the scarcity of jobs and the government's acceleration of its deportation program, with Mexicans being the primary target.

By the middle of the 1930's, the tempo of Mexican immigration, legal and illegal, increased for several reasons: 1) the availability of jobs once again in the United States; 2) the increase in the population of Mexico as health conditions improved drastically,[70] and; 3) the fact that, although progress in land distribution had been made, more than two and a half million Mexican families were still landless and poverty was a fact of life.[71]

In relation to the growing number of immigrants, deportations remained low, a pattern which continued into the early 1940's because of a serious shortage of labor as World War II caused American workers to be pulled out of factories and off the farms into the battlefields.

Migrant workers, already in this country were rapidly absorbed into the higher paying factory jobs, leaving southwestern growers without enough workers to plant and harvest their crops. Because of the war and previously established immigration quotas, European and Asian immigrants were not available to fill these jobs. In addition, the internment of some 100,000 Japanese-Americans in the western United States during the war served to exacerbate the problem.

One method of solving this labor shortage was for American officials to look the other way as thousands of 'mojados' (wetbacks)[72] and 'alambristas' (wire-crossers)[73] swam the Rio Grande or crossed the border fences. Incentives were great; in the early 1930's, the average Mexican peasant was earning 44 centavos a day, equal to about eleven cents in United States money.[74] Across the border, jobs and money were waiting for him. In fact, the demand for workers in the United States continued to exceed the supply.

Under increasing pressure from large agricultural interests, particularly in the southwest, the United States government initiated negotiations with the Mexican government to bring workers into this country legally. Reluctant because of the discrimination suffered by Mexican workers in earlier years, the Mexican government finally agreed to such a plan as part of its contribution to the United States war effort.[75] In 1942, a "Bracero" program was initiated. Begun as an emergency war measure, the program was extended several times and, during the 22 years of its existance, approximately 4.8 million braceros were contracted.[76]

The Bracero was a Mexican admitted to the United States to perform contract labor. Originally, the purpose was to provide agricultural workers; however some were soon diverted to industry and the railroads.[77] Although both governments made stipulations to protect the workers, the bracero program "did not eliminate exploitation; it merely set limits on it."[78]

The popularity of the program among Mexicans was such that a special recruiting station was set up in Mexico City's National Stadium where thousands of Mexicans, primarily peasants from the interior, were processed before being transported across the border. (Figure 21)

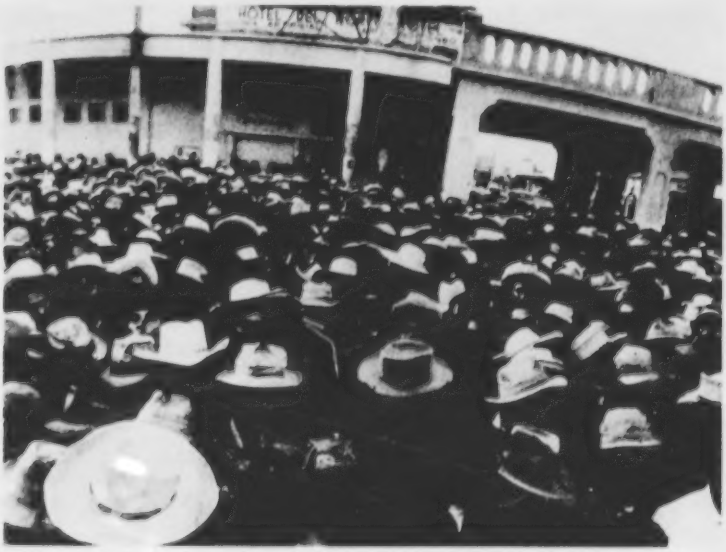

**Figure 21:** *Typical Bracero Recruiting Scene* [79]

Although the original agreement between the two governments included safeguards which guaranteed the rights of Mexican workers to minimum wages, paid transportation, living expenses, and repatriation as well as stipulations that Mexicans were not to be used to replace domestic workers or to fix wages, many of these safeguards were relaxed when United States growers exerted their considerable influence.

The bracero program continued to function until 1964; however, by 1947 growers had been required to post a cash

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bond for each bracero as a safeguard against the worker being stranded which tended to cut the numbers of Mexicans being brought in. In addition, by 1945, American soldiers had begun returning to their jobs, once again causing the labor market to tighten. Thus, we see the paradox of workers being brought in legally under the bracero program at the same time that Mexican deportation statistics once again began the climb upward.

It becomes obvious that the attitude of the United States government toward Mexican immigration, legal and illegal, has largely been determined by the state of our economy, relaxing when jobs are plentiful and tightening up when jobs are scarce. It is also obvious that the problem of illegal border crossing is one which will not disappear in the near future.

Nowhere in the world does there exist another national boundary separating two nations with such economic disparities as the United States and Mexico. In 1970, for instance, the Gross National Produce for the United States was $974 billion as compared to $33 billion for Mexico. Per capita income in the United States in the same year was $4,756 compared to $656 in Mexico,[80] with many Mexicans below the poverty level.

Thus, even the poorest paid work in the fields of southwestern United States provided an incentive for Mexicans to cross the border, even though they ran the risk of being preyed upon by roving gangs of bandits on both sides of the border.

Under the headline "Border Thugs Ambush Aliens," the *Detroit Free Press* of June 17, 1976 prints an article datelined San Ysidro, California:[81]

> *Ruben Ochoa is 16 years old and one of 12 children of a poor farm laborer whose home is a dirt floor shack in the Mexican state of Michoacan... he... set out for the north, hoping to slip across the border into the United States and find jobs to help ease the abject poverty of [his] family.*
>
> *After crawling through a hole in the border fence at midnight and proceeding about 75 yards... set upon by seven teenagers with knives who took what little money they had and and left Ruben writhing... with a partially severed spinal cord.*
>
> *In the last 5 months, at least five aliens have been killed and scores wounded in reported robbery attacks...*
>
> *Many women among the 'wetbacks' have been gang raped...*

Despite the obvious dangers, illegal entries persist, And even once he is safely across the border, troubles do not cease for the migrant worker from Mexico. The standard of living for these people has been and is among the lowest in the United States. Poor, or even non-existant housing, lack of proper sanitary facilities, overcrowding, and the absence of school and proper medical care for their children are among the abuses that Mexican migrant workers must live with if they want to work in this country.

Lured by tales of Yankee affluence, many migrant families found, instead, a life of deprivation and harsh existance amid some of the most primitive living conditions imagineable. (Figure 22)

**Figure 22:** *Migrant Worker Conditions Circa 1960*

Although restrictions on employers were enforced to some degree, some unscrupulous farmers knowingly hired undocumented field hands and then reported them to the authorities just before payday.[82] But poor Mexicans continue to come to the United States illegally because even the poor conditions here offer more than the even poorer conditions in the interior of Mexico.

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For the privilege of performing back-breaking work at bare subsistence wages, illegal Mexican aliens must live in constant dread of being discovered and deported even though many of them have lived in the United States for many years and often have families born here.

Although deportations have always been a grim reality to many immigrants to the United States, particularly Mexicans, formal deportation proceedings are not the most frequent method of removing illegal aliens from this country. Many of those who are apprehended in regular round-ups are permitted to leave the country "voluntarily" without formal hearings.

Since 1950, large numbers of Mexican aliens have been returned to their homeland with the numbers reaching a peak in 1953, declining to a low in 1961 and continuing on the rise steadily through 1974. (Figure 23)

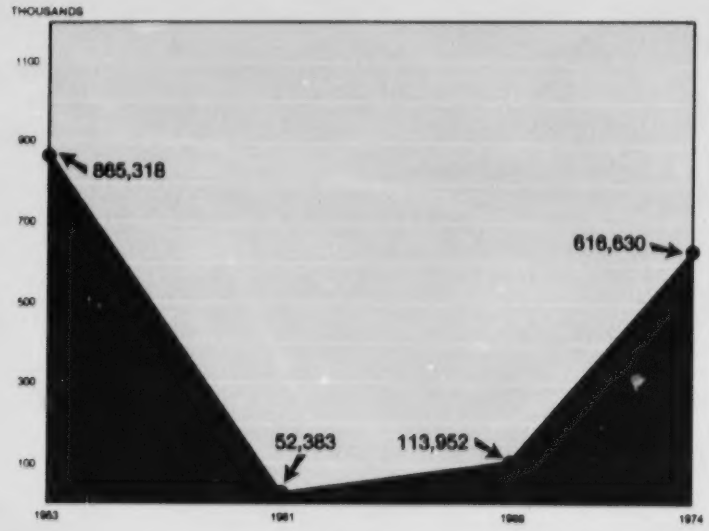


**Figure 23:** *Deportable Mexican Aliens Apprehended for Selected Years*[83]

It is obvious that the situation as it still exists today, desperately needs attention from both countries involved and that something must be done to alleviate the serious problems which exist.

In 1976, it was estimated that there were six to eight million illegal aliens in this country, the majority of Mexican origin.[84] Concern over these aliens is twofold: 1) their impact on the domestic market, and 2) their victimization by employers. In 1977, President Carter proposed a comprehensive program which, among other stipulations, would grant permanent resident status and eventual citizenship to illegal Mexican aliens who had entered the United States before January 1, 1970 and who had resided here continuously since that time. Those who arrived between 1970 and 1977 would be eligible for a temporary resident status for five years.[85] Unfortunately, to date, the situation has not been resolved by enactment of laws.

Illegal aliens, however, present only part of the overall immigration picture. Mexico now leads all other nations in the number of legal immigrants to the United States. (Figure 24)

**Figure 24:** *Leading Sources of Newcomers to the U.S., 1975* [86]

Because Mexico is the single greatest source of immigrants to this country, legal as well as illegal, and since the proximity of the two countries almost guarantees a continued flow of such immigration, it behooves us to understand and recognize the contributions made by Mexicans to the history of the United States in general and to Michigan and Detroit in particular.

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## *Mexicans in Michigan*

Attracted by descriptions of a land of employment and prosperity, Mexican immigrants and migrants began to arrive in Michigan in significant numbers during the early years of the 20th century, usually after an initial stop in one of the southwestern border states. Three major factors played important roles in their decisions to come to Michigan: 1) railroads which had employed Mexican track hands in other states began to transfer them as far north as Detroit;[87] 2) the announcement of the $5.00 work day by the Ford Motor Company lured thousands of immigrants, including Mexicans to work in the automobile and related industries; and, 3) the sugar beet industry which had heretofore employed Mexican workers primarily in the southwest began to import them to the Midwest.[88] This latter factor was by far the most significant in terms of numbers of Mexican migrants coming to Michigan.

The decade from 1910 to 1920 saw a remarkable increase in foreign born Mexicans in this state and the numbers continued to rise during the next ten years. (Figure 25)

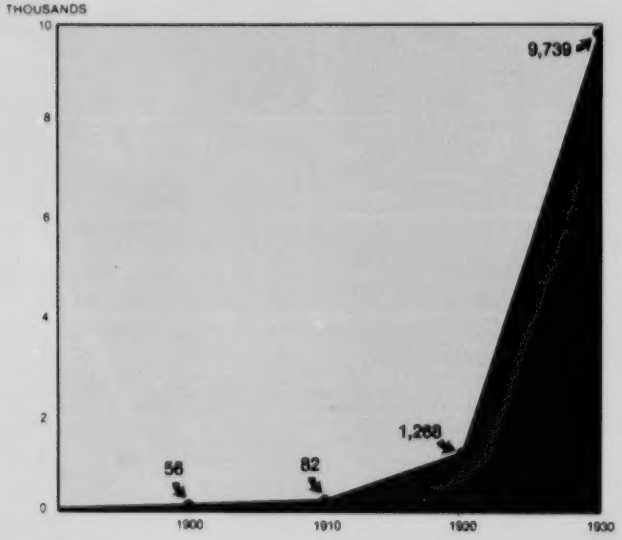


**Figure 25:** *Foreign Born Mexican Population of Michigan, 1900-1930* [89]

Of Michigan's Mexican population in 1920, by far the most significant number were found in Wayne County, with more than 700 in the City of Detroit. It must be noted that because the Mexican population at any given time included many transient workers who were never really absorbed into Michigan communities, or who were simply not counted in any official census, any statistics reflect an undercount of the actual Mexican born population of Michigan during any time span. The comparatively large percentage of single men (solos) also affected available statistics since many of them lived in boarding houses and were not counted individually.

Despite these shortcomings, the statistics for 1920 reveal an interesting pattern in Michigan when broken down into city components. (Figure 26)

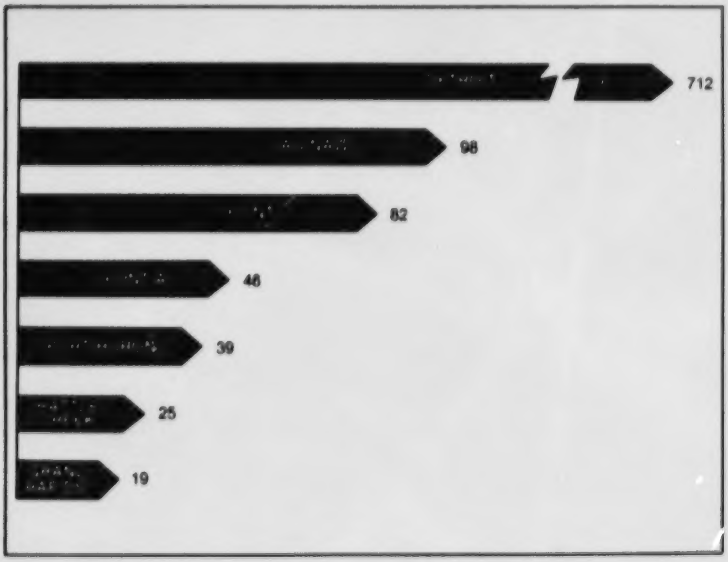


**Figure 26:** *Selected Michigan Cities with Foreign Born Mexican Population, 1920* [90]

Although the role of railroads in attracting Mexican settlers to Michigan was not as important as it was in Illinois or In-

diana, hundreds of immigrants and migrants first arrived in this state because of jobs on railroad section crews. Usually these workers were contracted in the southwestern states. The experience of one Detroit resident who entered the United States in 1916 illustrates this process:[91]

> *The first time I was contracted, it was in San Antonio. I didn't come to Michigan. I went to Pennsylvania. There were about two hundred of us on contract on a train to Pennsylvania. And from San Antonio to Pittsburgh, you know how many of us arrived? Only sixty-five. They would reach the stations and go their own way. They already knew where they were going, only wanted the ride. In Cincinnati about thirty-five left. Only the green ones arrived in Pittsburgh.*

Just as it had attracted immigrants from all over the world, Detroit's automobile industry attracted Mexicans, whether they came specifically to work in the auto plants, or came to Michigan first as migrant farm workers and then moved into the higher paying factory jobs.

It was the sugar beet companies, however, which played the most important role in luring tens of thousands of Mexican workers by paying for one-way tickets to Michigan. The first trainload of Mexican farm laborers rolled into the state in the spring of 1915.[92] A large percentage of them had been recruited in Texas towns like El Paso and San Antonio; most of them originally had come from Mexico's central meseta states.

In the words of one such migrant:[93]

> *The companies would send "enganchadores" down to the south and advertise in the newspapers that they need a certain amount of people, and the enganchadore offices were in San Antonio — people would gather there. I came in a special train where they had 600 workers. We came to a small town named Alma. There the workers were divided to different areas. I got to go to a small town near Marysville where I stayed for three months. And from there I came to Detroit.*

Thus the route evolved — a route which began in the interior of Mexico, led to the towns south of the Rio Grande, moved into the Texas towns north of the border, and thence to areas where workers were needed, including Michigan.

This became the pattern followed by many of the Mexicans who came to Michigan to work in the beet fields which were

scattered throughout the thumb area of Michigan as well as in Monroe and Lenawee Countries. (Figure 27)

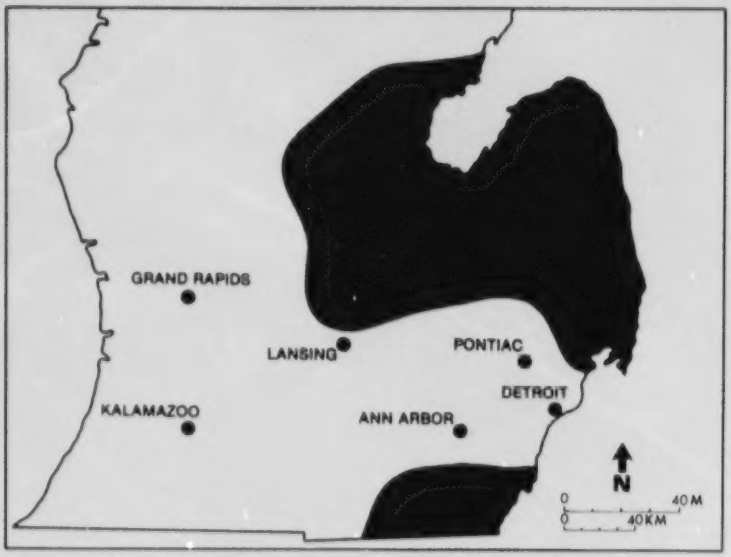


**Figure 27:** *Sugar Beet Growing Areas of Michigan, circa 1920's*

Eager to come to Michigan for the jobs, many Mexicans were sadly disillusioned when they saw the conditions under which they would have to work. An excerpt from the translation of a Mexican folk song of that era gives us an insight into the thoughts of these workers:

THE BEETFIELD WORKERS (LOS BETABELEROS)

In the year 1923
Of the present era
The beet field workers went
To that Michigan, to their grief
Because all the bosses
Began to scold
And Don Santiago says to them:
"I want to return
Because they haven't done for us
What they said they would.
Here they come and they tell you
That you ought to go up there
Because there you will have everything
Without having to fight for it.
But these are nothing but lies,
And those who come and say those things are liars."[94]

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It was this kind of disillusionment which influenced many Mexicans to leave the beet fields to try to find work in the industrial centers, particularly Detroit. Of course, there were also many who, from the beginning, had no intention of staying in the fields, but simply used the offer of the free train ride to bring them north. One such recruit says:[95]

> *At six in the morning we were on our way up to Michigan. We were on a sugar beet contract in 1922. A man from San Antonio was in charge of one of the seven passenger cars, and was also in charge of feeding the passengers, mostly canned food. Mr. and Mrs. ____ were in the same train as us with their two children. My girl friend helped Mrs. ____ with her children. By the time we arrived at Mt. Pleasant, Michigan we were friends and they thought we were married. Mr. ____ already knew Detroit, so we went to Detroit.*

After that first trainload in 1915, the sugar beet companies alone brought some 2,000 Mexicans per year to work in the Michigan fields. It must be kept in mind, however, that there was a constant turnover of migrant labor of about 50% which made this steady flow of new workers necessary if beets were to be planted and harvested.[96]

The largest recruiting center in the southwest was La Plaza de los Zacatecas in San Antonio, Texas. The philosophy of the "enganchistas" (recruiters) was to recruit families rather than "solos" (single men), rationalizing that families tended to stay in the north while young males generally returned to their homeland at the end of each season. In addition, entire families were able to care for acreage more efficiently, since all members of the family, including young children, were used as labor.

One long-time resident of the Detroit Colonia remembers that he was turned away by an enganchista in San Antonio because he was young and single. He quickly solved this problem by convincing a young waitress at a local diner to pretend she was his wife. In 1922, posing as a married couple, they were able to get free passage to Michigan. Similar ruses were used by others to finance their transportation northward.

In the early days of the sugar beet industry, Michigan's crops had been planted, cultivated, and harvested by Polish, Belgian, Hungarian, Russian, and German immigrants who had

settled on small farms near the state's major sugar beet districts. Several factors were responsible for the relatively rapid transition from Eastern European to Mexican field workers: 1) the outbreak of World War I halted immigration from Europe; 2) those European immigrants already in Michigan moved into higher paying industrial jobs or were able to buy their own land and thus become independent; and 3) in 1921 and 1924, immigration acts were passed which severely limited the number of Europeans allowed to enter the United States.[97] It became more expedient than ever to recruit workers from south of the border.

During these years, several organizations like the Beet Grower's Employment Committee were formed by the employers to recruit entire families of Mexicans for their fields. Many of the newcomers had been urban dwellers in Mexico, with little or no field experience, but in their eagerness to migrate northward, they took the jobs.

According to contemporary newspaper accounts, Michigan's population of Mexican sugar beet workers appears to have peaked at about 55,000 during the 1920's.[98] It was in 1929 that the sugar beet industry of Michigan imported its final trainload of Mexican workers, consisting of 635 full fares and 74 half fares. During these peak years, almost half the sugar beet hands in Michigan as well as in adjacent Ohio counties were Mexicans and the beet growers were considered by many as menaces to the state's economic and social structure because of the number of beet workers who were 'dumped' at the end of each season to find their ways into the mainstream of Michigan employment.[99] But there were other reasons accounting for the increase of permanent Mexican residents in Michigan. Many young men who arrived as 'solos' married local girls and settled down near their wives' families; others were able to move into good paying jobs in the factories and plants of Saginaw, Flint, Lansing, Kalamazoo, Pontiac, and Detroit.

Michigan also became the target of a large "chain-migration" of friends and relatives of the original immigrants and migrants, moving from their original settlement sites in Texas and other border states to the towns and cities of Michigan.

The number of foreign born Mexicans in Michigan reached

a peak in 1930. Then, increased mechanization in the fields and the after-effects of the 1929 stock market failure brought about drastic cuts in the numbers of workers needed. Thus, in the early 1930's, more Mexicans were leaving the state than entering it, so that the 1940 census showed a drop of more than 50 percent from the previous census count. (Figure 28)

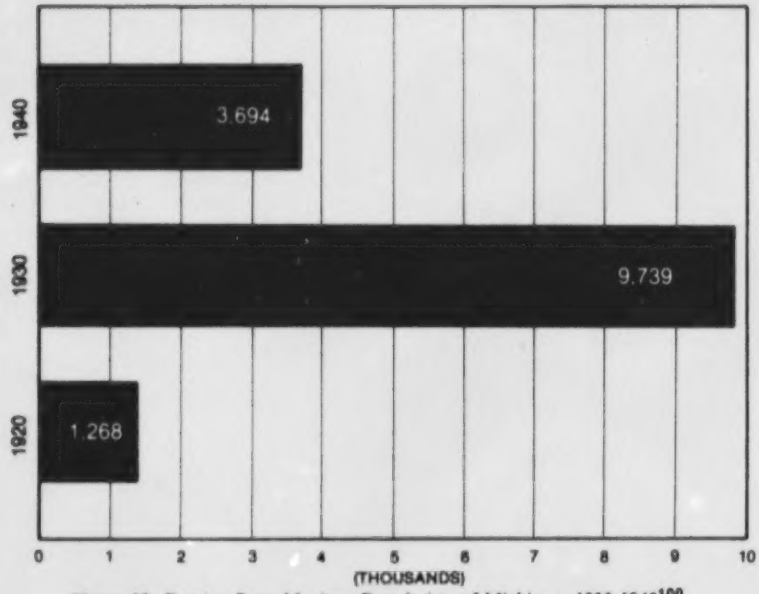


**Figure 28:** *Foreign Born Mexican Population of Michigan, 1920-1940*[100]

Again, it should be reiterated that the census counts of Mexican-Americans were, at best, unreliable. However, the trend is certainly evident.

By the late 1930's with the stabilization of the country's economy, Michigan's need for farm workers increased once again. Despite the extensive use of machinery, the state's sugar beet industry alone, with some 140,000 acres of planting, needed some 20,000 field workers. At the same time, Michigan was fast becoming one of the nation's leading producers of beans, pickles, fruits and vegetables, creating a need for even more field hands. These factors as well as the avalability of jobs in in-

dustry are reflected in the steady increase of foreign born Mexicans counted in Michigan during this period. (Figure 29)

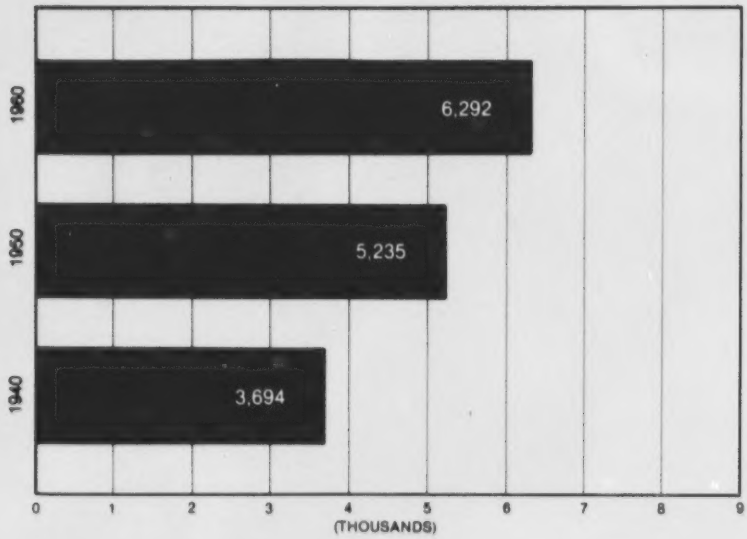


**Figure 29:** *Foreign Born Mexican Population of Michigan, 1940-1960*[101–102]

The need for workers increased at such a pace during the 1940's that legal immigration, even including the Bracero program, could not keep pace with the demand. As a result, the transportation of illegal immigrants became a lucrative business for those willing to exploit the job seekers. Many Mexicans paid for transportation across the river with the guarantee of a job in the United States, only to find themselves dumped, alone and broke, where they could be picked up by the United States Border Patrol. Those who did make it into the border states soon learned that jobs were more available in the north, but getting there became the problem. A favorite method of transporting illegal Mexican aliens from Texas to Michigan was the underground truck route. Although drivers caught transporting such workers were dealt with harshly, the profits were such that it was a lucrative business and well worth the risks.

Labor recruiters in Texas would load a stake truck to capacity with Mexican workers and cover them with tarpaulins

for a frenzied trip north. Stops en-route were virtually non-existant and the maneuvering necessary to evade the authorities resulted in many accidents; some of the workers became ill or even died on the way.[103]

Each year between April 1 and June 1, thousands of such illegally transported Mexicans would arrive in Michigan to spend about 30 days blocking, thinning, and hoeing sugar beets. With harvest occurring between October 15 and December 1, most workers realized only about 75 days of actual paid work during the average 7 to 8 month period for which they had been hired. Lucky workers could sometimes pick up non-contract work during the beet off-season in pickle, string bean, tomato, and onion fields as well as in the fruit orchards.[104] However, most beet field owners adopted the practice of withholding a substantial portion of each worker's pay until the end of the beet season to prevent them from leaving the beet districts.[105]

Mexican migrant workers in Michigan as elsewhere, found working conditions to be much less attractive than the picture which had been painted for them by recruiters in Mexico and Texas.

One local Mexican-American remembers how she and her family were told that in Michigan one could gather up the dollar bills in the beet fields. She also remembers how her tears and those of hundreds of her countrymen watered the fields when they discovered the deplorable conditions under which they were forced to work and live.[106]

Hundreds of shacks without electricity or running water had been hastily built to accomodate the migrant workers. Forced to use community out-houses and to drink from central water supplies where mosquitos bred, workers and their families were often treated little better than slaves. At a disadvantage because of language and cultural differences and in desperate need of the money they could earn, most Mexican migrants had no choice but to accept the deplorable conditions. It is little wonder that as soon as jobs became available, many left the farmers' fields for the factories of the cities. This sequence of

movement from Mexico via the southwestern states to rural and then to urban Michigan is a pattern which can be found in the backgrounds of many Mexican-Americans in the Detroit area.

The urbanization process accelerated when industries began operating at full capacity to meet the demands of World War II, nearly doubling Michigan's labor force between 1940 and 1950. The number of Mexicans in industry-related jobs increased proportionately.

Thus, although agricultural work played an undeniably important role in bringing Mexicans to Michigan, most of those who remained farm workers were itinerants who returned to Mexico or the southwest between crops. It was the Mexicans who left the farms for the factories soon after their arrival in the state along with those who entered non-agricultural occupations without ever having done farm work, who established the permanent Mexican settlement sites in Michigan. Census statistics illustrate the relationship between urban and rural foreign born Mexicans in Michigan after 1940. (Figure 30)

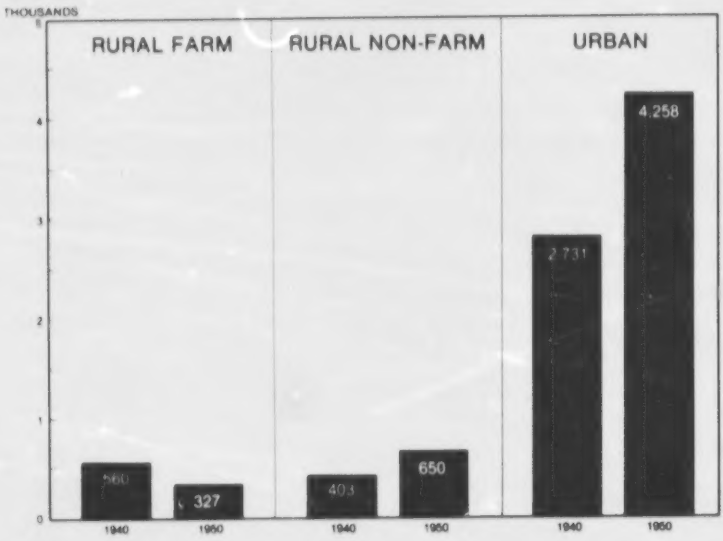


**Figure 30:** *Foreign Born Mexican Population of Michigan: Urban vs Rural, 1940-1950*[107-110]

During this same period, cities in which the foreign born Mexican population had peaked before the depression and then declined, once again began to experience an increase in the number of Mexicans, although except for Detroit, they were never again to reach the totals of the 1930 statistics. (Figure 31)

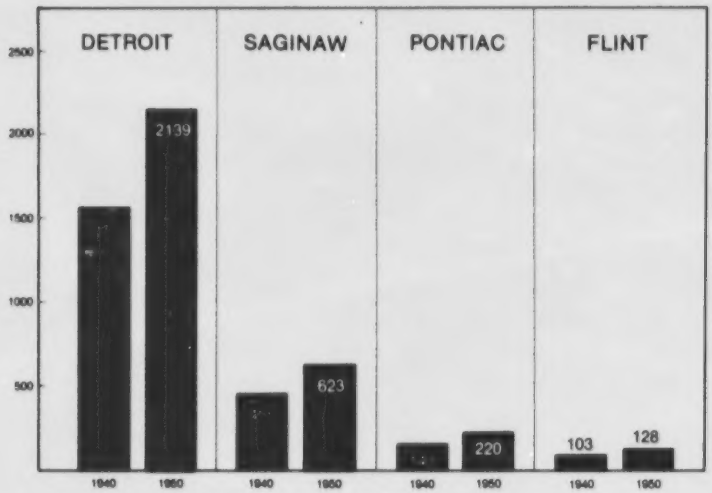


**Figure 31:** *Foreign Born Mexican Population of Selected Michigan Cities, 1940-1950*
111-114

By this time, the importance of Detroit as a permanent settlement site for Mexican immigrants and migrants becomes obvious and a look at the history of the Detroit community is worthy of further study.

## *The Detroit Colonia*

The first Mexicans who arrived in Detroit were attracted by the same magnet which had drawn countless other ethnic peoples — jobs. Although the 1900 Census showed only 8

foreign born Mexicans in Detroit, by 1920, the community had grown considerably. (Figure 32)

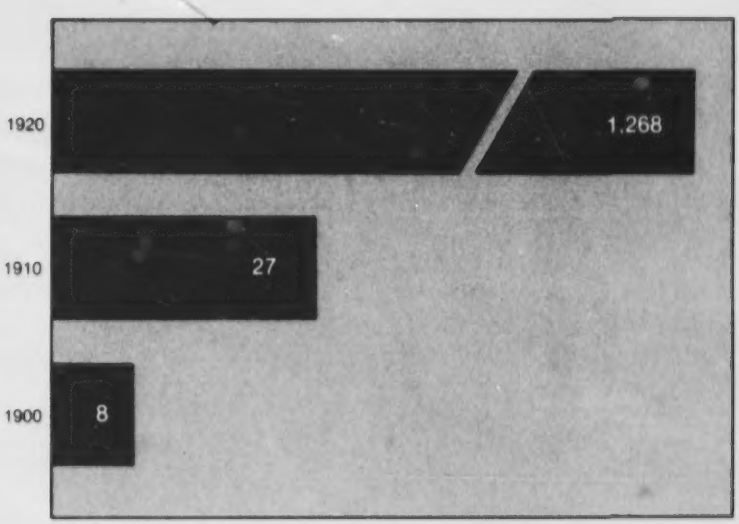


**Figure 32:** *Foreign Born Mexican Population of Detroit, 1900-1920* [115]

Various factors were responsible for the growth of the Colonia: 1) some movement to Detroit at the end of each Michigan sugar beet season by workers seeking to escape the monotonous and poorly paid field jobs; 2) the availability of industrial jobs caused by the labor shortage created by World War I; 3) railroad section hands 'dropping off' in Detroit; and, 4) social upheaval in Mexico caused by the Mexican Revolution.

Often, the route to Detroit was a circuitous one.

One local resident who experienced many moves before contracting to the Iowa beet fields and subsequently reaching Detroit relates:[116]

> *I went up to Pueblo, Colorado during the first World War. And when it ended jobs were scarce. My father and brother worked in a steel mill. Their jobs ended and we moved to Mexico City. But we had liked the United States so we saved for four years and moved here. We moved to San Antonio where we met a beet contractor. Then we moved to Iowa. Coming from San Antonio where it was hot, we were wearing summer clothing. We arrived in Iowa in April and it was snowing. We, the youngest ones in the family were children. We were really young, but we all did the work. We finished the work and from there we moved to Detroit because a man we knew from Pueblo was already working at Ford's.*

Still another chronicles her trip to Detroit: [117]

> *I came in 1920 with my mother, father, brother, and sister. We were very poor. We had lived eight years in Texas. I was married there. By that time, my father died so I had to make a trip to Mexico with my husband. We stayed a year in San Luis Potosi. We returned to Texas with the promise that my husband was going to take me directly to Detroit because by that time my mother and brother were already in Detroit. That promise didn't come true til 8 months later. My mother and brother helped us out with bonds. And we came here on a train.*

In this manner, Detroit's Mexican settlement continued to grow and to provide a friendly refuge for Mexican immigrants and their families among compatriots whose common language, religion, and customs made them feel at home.

Mexicans were scattered throughout the city during the early 1900's but noticeable Spanish speaking communities or "barrios" (neighborhoods) gradually became evident. One such area was on the near east side of downtown Detroit in the vicinity of Lafayette and Congress Streets.[118] A Mexican restaurant, barbershop, bar, pool hall, and several other establishments which catered primarily to Mexicans attested to the ethnic flavor of the community.

By 1926, identifiable Mexican settlement sites were found in Fordson (Dearborn), in the Michigan-Junction area, and in

part of the Irish Settlement "Corktown," on the lower west side of Detroit.[119-120] (Figure 33)

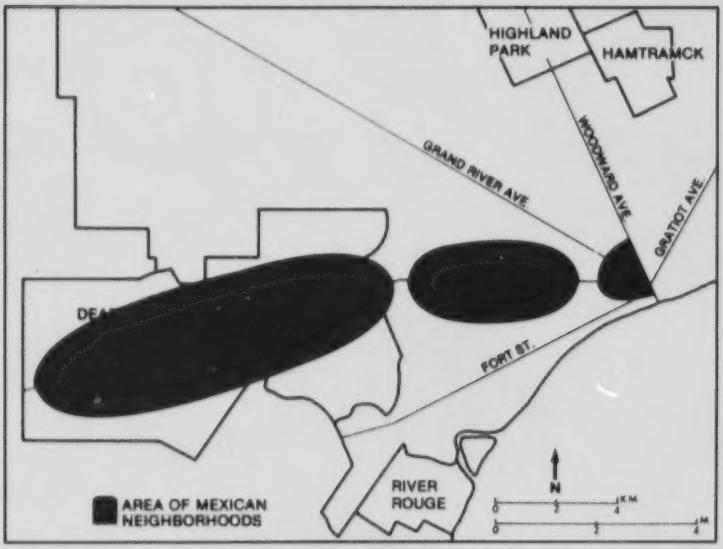


**Figure 33:** *Mexican neighborhoods, Detroit area, circa 1926*

A contemporary newspaper account cited the Mexican community of Detroit in 1926 as "the best organized national group among us."[121]

One of the earliest signs of a viable community life in the 1920's was the weekly get-together in a room of St. Mary's Church on the corner of Monroe and Beaubien Streets. Although this was a German Church located at the edge of Greektown, a Spanish priest said mass in the mother tongue each Sunday morning while the afternoon provided time for Mexican socialization. Small children played in the church yard and were given language and history lessons; the ladies met to enjoy a welcome break from the chores of the week; and the men played cards, sang "corridos" (Mexican folk songs) and discussed politics.

It was here also, that el Circulo Mutualista Mexicano (Mexican Mutual Aid Circle) was founded in 1922 with 150 members who paid weekly dues which were used to care for the sick, help the homeless, and send money to the needy in Mexico.

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The most common form of fund raising was the Saturday night dance.[122] [123] One occasion when the Circulo rendered assistance involved an elderly lady who had been stranded in Grand Rapids. The senora had been brought to Michigan by a Mexican couple to care for their children. They believed that they could maintain her as well as themselves. However, they soon discovered that even with both of them working, they could barely make ends meet, and so one day, they just didn't come back to their hotel, leaving the elderly lady behind, alone and penniless. When the hotel manager discovered his paying tenants had disappeared, the senora was turned out.

Without money and unable to speak English, she walked out of town along the railroad tracks and finally met a group of Mexican railroad workers who took pity on her. They scraped together the fare to Detroit and wrote a note for her to show the first policeman she met. The officer in turn, directed her to the leaders of El Circulo who sponsored a dance and provided the senora with enough funds to return home to Mexico.

El Circulo provided the leadership which organized the first Mexican Catholic parish in Detroit in 1923, Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe).[124-125] (Figure 34)

**Figure 34:** *Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Circa 1930's*[126]

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As the Mexican population of the city expanded, several other church oriented groups came into existance, including La Sociedad de Damas Catolicas (The Society of Catholic Women), which concerned itself with social welfare activities and the Sociedad de San Jose (The Society of St. Joseph) which was devoted to the well-being of the church itself.

By the middle of the 1920's, the Mexican consulate system was extremely well organized. A contemporary newspaper account says "...a Comision Honorofica Mexicana or Mexican Honorary Commission...branches out into every place where as many as 100 Mexicans are found"[127] providing members of the community with all standard consular services, as well as encouraging the celebration of such national festival days of Mexico as El Cinco de Maia (The 5th of May) which commemorated the defeat of the French in the 19th century and each September 16th, which memorialized Mexico's independence.

Another important self-help group was La Cruz Azul Mexicana (Mexican Blue Cross) led by the women of the community, which dealt with cases requiring charitable or medical attention.[128]

A Centro Cultura (Cultural Center) was formed as a gathering place for the upper-middle class Mexicans of the community with an emphasis on cultural and literary activities. Members wrote poetry, organized recitals and sponsored dramatic performances. It was the leadership of this organization which formed a committee in 1932 to welcome to Detroit the famous Mexican Muralist, Diego Rivera, whose monumental work honoring Detroit's workers adorns the walls of the Detroit Institute of Arts.[129]

Many other societies, including mutual aid groups as well as social clubs and youth organizations were formed during these early years, testifying to the permanence of the Mexican settlements. From these groups sprang El Comite Patriotico Mexicano (Mexican Patriotic Committee) which assumed responsibility for the commemoration of Mexican holidays.[130] One of their first large-scale celebrations was the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe held in 1920, but by the mid 1920's, the Col-

onia's commemoration of Mexico's independence on the 16th of September had evolved into the most important social event of the year for the Mexican community.

Months before that date, the young ladies of the Colonia sold tickets, practiced poetry readings, and rehearsed songs and dances in preparation for the Queen's Pageant during which one of them would rule over the entire Mexican community. On the day of the program itself, hundreds of men, women and children gathered at the local hall where community leaders delivered stirring patriotic speeches, children recited Mexican poetry, and musical and dance groups rendered well-rehearsed performances. This most popular celebration continues to be an annual highlight for the Mexicans of Detroit which appeals to young and old alike. (Figure 35)[131]

**Figure 35:** *Typical Celebration of the 16th of September*

But life in the Colonia was not all celebration — there were drawbacks, one of the major problems being discrimination. Although it is generally conceded that there was less discrimina-

tion in Detroit than in many other cities, there were still homeowners who refused to rent to Mexicans unless they lied about their backgrounds and claimed Spain or France as their homeland.

In the words of a Detroit resident who moved to a home on 23rd Street in the heart of the Barrio in 1928:[132]

> *When we moved into our house we told the neighbors we were Mexican. But some other families across the street had to claim they were Spanish to get their homes because they didn't want Mexicans. Our house was rented to us through a neighbor. When the owner of the house dropped by to collect the rent, he asked what nationality we were. And when we told him we were Mexican he said he didn't want Mexicans in his house because they were too dirty. My husband convinced him to let us prove that we were not dirty by letting us stay for at least two months.*

There were also many barbershops, restaurants, bars and other public places which either segregated or completely barred Mexicans. On one occasion, when two Mexican couples entered a local dance hall on a Saturday night, the first couple, light complected, was allowed entry with no problem; the second couple however, included a young lady with a dark complexion and was not permitted to enter the establishment. No explanation was offered, but all involved knew the reason.[133]

Such incidents did not prevent or discourage Mexican settlement in Detroit, however, but by the end of the 1920's most of the growth was occurring in Corktown, a neighborhood on the near west side surrounding the baseball stadium, which had been named after the Irish immigrants who had settled there in earlier years. Although the neighborhood was already showing signs of deterioration, Mexicans found it an inexpensive and friendly place in which to live.

Along Michigan and Trumbull Avenues, settlement houses provided rooms and there was a hotel on the corner of Third and Jefferson owned by a Spaniard which welcomed Mexican tenants. By this time, also, there was a store on Michigan Avenue owned by a Syrian immigrant and his Mexican wife,

which sold Mexican food specialties. Corktown began to take on a decidedly Mexican flavor.[134] (Figure 36)

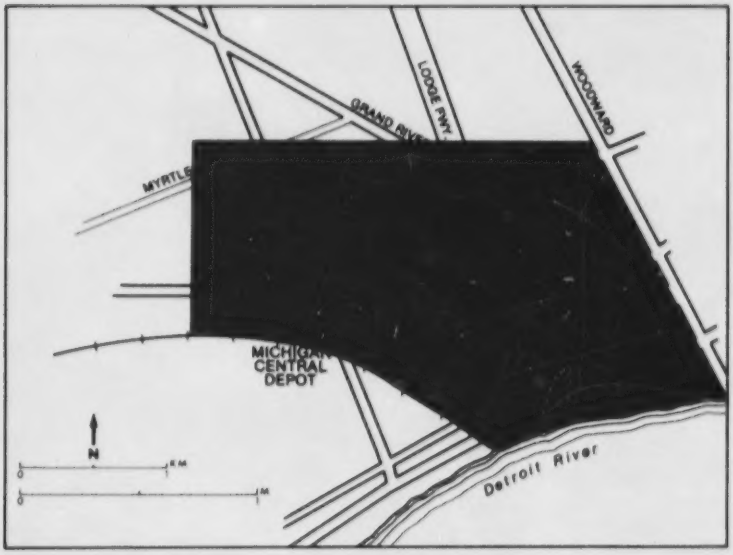


**Figure 36:** *Mexican Settlement, Corktown Area, 1920's*

In those days, jobs were plentiful and Mexican breadwinners could not only provide the necessities of life for their families but could even begin to plan for a better future. Then economic disaster hit in the late 20's and the situation changed drastically!

## *La Crisis: The Great Depression*

People of all races and national origin were affected by the Depression. Thousands of workers lost their jobs and were forced to seek help in relief programs, public works projects, and in the soup lines. All over the country, government and union officials, unable to find solutions for the many problems caused by the slump began to look around for scapegoats and focused on the alien population, especially Mexicans, as one of the ma-



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jor causes for American joblessness.[135-136] Mexican contract labor was prevented from entering the country and immigration visas to Mexican nationals were cut from an average of almost 5,000 per month in 1927 to something less than 300 over a seven month period in 1931.[137]

What had been one of the most significant in-migrations in American history during the 1920's now, in the 1930's, turned into an equally significant out-migration with almost three-fourths of all Mexican nationals in the United States returning to their homeland.[138] According to a contemporary newspaper account "...Michigan has permanently lost a colony the size of Lansing, and a community larger than Detroit has been lost in the United States."[139]

And so it was in Detroit, also. The city set up a Mexican Bureau where all applicants of Mexican descent who sought assistance of any kind were encouraged to return to their homeland. In this manner, many of Detroit's Mexican immigrants and migrants were repatriated — some voluntarily and others because of pressures applied by social workers and government officials.

In 1930, the Detroit Consulate issued repatriation certificates to 1,000 families; in 1931, four hundred Mexicans left for the border; and in November 1932, a "final clean-up" saw more than 5,000 Detroit Mexicans returned to their home land. Some were leaving a city which had been home to them for more than a decade and the group included several hundred American born children.[140] Many of these departees were guided by an innate pride. One of a group which left in October, 1931 said: "The Welfare was nice to us. They supported my wife and six children for over a year. But I did not want their charity, I wanted a job."[141] And of course, there were no jobs — or at least, not enough.

Other Mexicans were influenced by contemporary newspaper articles promising families which decided to return to Mexico a house, a plot of land, food and assistance until their rehabilitation was complete. Mexico welcomed her "repatriados" because they were needed on the land, but as in any program of this kind, many problems were encountered and the returnees were often forced to suffer the worst of both worlds during the repatriation process.[142]

As the problems caused by the depression continued,

several concerned citizens within the Mexican community in Detroit met to organize the Liga de Obrero U Campasinos Mexicanos (League of Mexican Peasants and Workers) in order to help their compatriots — those who wished to return to Mexico as well as those who wished to stay. Three weeks after its inception, some 800 persons had joined the League, of which Louis G. Gasca, a local Spanish language newspaper publisher was elected president. The local office was established on Toledo Avenue and branches existed in other parts of Michigan as well as on Ohio.

One of the most active members of the League was Diego Rivera, who had attracted nationwide attention because of the controversies surrounding his mural in the Detroit Institute of Arts. He wrote:[143]

> *. . . I occupied the greater part of my time in attempting to help migratory Mexicans, of whom several hundred lived in Detroit, in constant dread of being deported.*
>
> *. . . some among my former countrymen . . . thought conditions were better in Mexico . . . dreamed of establishing agricultural colonies south of the Rio Grande . . . I tried to convince them . . . that a return to Mexico would not solve their problems; that having established roots in the United States, they must act with other Americans to achieve a betterment of their economic position.*
>
> *Unfortunately, I failed in my purpose . . . I gave them most of the money I had earned painting the Art Institute frescoes . . . they returned to Mexico and established three colonies. Only one . . . near Acapulco, survived.*

Unfortunately, Rivera's predictions that a return to Mexico would not solve existing problems for Detroit's Mexicans came true in many instances. Many who had left Detroit by train or auto waited for weeks, stranded in border towns such as Juarez and Laredo, until they were forced to sell their meager belongings to pay their way back to the north.

Meanwhile, Rivera's mural "Man and Machinery" which had been commissioned for the Detroit Institute of Arts by Edsel Ford, continued to be the center of controversy and criticism. Religious leaders and local government officials demanded the painting be "washed from the walls," and term-

ed figures "obscene."[144] But Edsel Ford came to the defense of the monumental work and visitors to the museum were, for the most part, enthusiastic. The murals were allowed to stand and are today recognized as one of Detroit's greatest art treasures. (Figure 37)

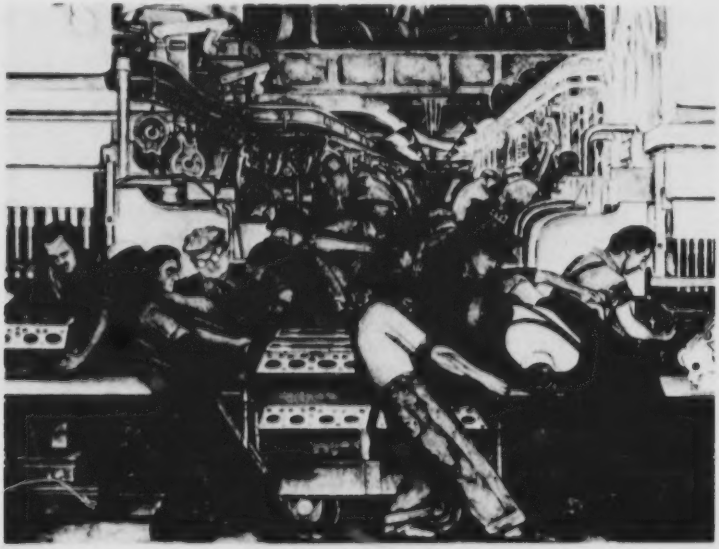

**Figure 37:** *Detail from "Man and Machinery", Detroit Institute of Arts (Courtesy Fine Arts Department, Detroit Public Library)*

Like many Americans, particularly ethnic minorities, most Mexicans were unemployed, or at least underemployed during the Depression years. Government programs created by the New Deal rescued some from total despair, but many were forced to undertake self-help enterprises. One of the most common was "junking." Using a dilapidated truck or car if they were lucky, or, more usually, a push-cart built from discarded parts, Mexicans travelled the countryside to pick up junk which could be sold in the city. On a good day, a man could earn 25 or 30 cents.[145] Then, in order to keep their families warm during the cold winter months, men and children picked up coal along the railroad tracks or around the coal piles of the Edison Company in southwest Detroit. As one old-timer recalls:[146]

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*At that time what could one do when one was turned away? There weren't any jobs; there was nothing. A friend and I would go down to Fort Street and steal coal. Edison Company had piles of coal. We would go there and fill our sacks. What were we to do?*

And so, the Colonia survived! Indeed, it did more than survive. Mexican Baptists were able to organize their own church, the first Mexican Protestant church in the city. Since the early 1920's, a small group of Mexicans had worshipped in the English speaking Baptist church on the corner of Magnolia and 24th Streets. In 1930, they officially organized into a church, and despite the fact that they were poor, they sent for a recent graduate of the Seminario Hispano in Los Angeles to lead the congregation.

By this time, Mexican Catholics had become an important segment of the primarily Irish membership of Most Holy Trinity Church in the heart of Corktown. A history of the parish published in 1973 points out: "Trinity was changing. People with foreign tongues and customs — Spanish, Maltese — began to be heard, the Irish to dwindle."[147] (Figure 38)

**Figure 38:** *Most Holy Trinity Church, Detroit*

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Church records indicate that the number of baptisms of Spanish surname parishioners jumped from 72 during the 1920's to 682 in the 1940's.[148] One of the best things to happen to the Mexican community was the arrival in the early 1940's of Father (Monsignor) Clement Kern who, in addition to providing Spanish language masses for his parishioners, initiated a bilingual cultural program to serve the community. A medical and dental clinic, and later, legal services were provided while language classes for foreign born Mexicans were held at nearby Houghton School. Casa Maria, a social work agency provided a place where the newly arrived immigrant or migrant could seek refuge in time of need.

Religious groups such as the Guadalupenas, Los Cabelleros Catolicos, and Los Cursillistas helped to preserve a strong religious orientation in the Colonia while encouraging the growth of the Mexican settlement surrounding Holy Trinity. In 1940, there were 1,565 foreign born Mexicans in Detroit. Almost one-third lived in three census tracts immediately adjacent to the church, while most of the remainder lived in contiguous tracts along Michigan Avenue. (Figure 39)

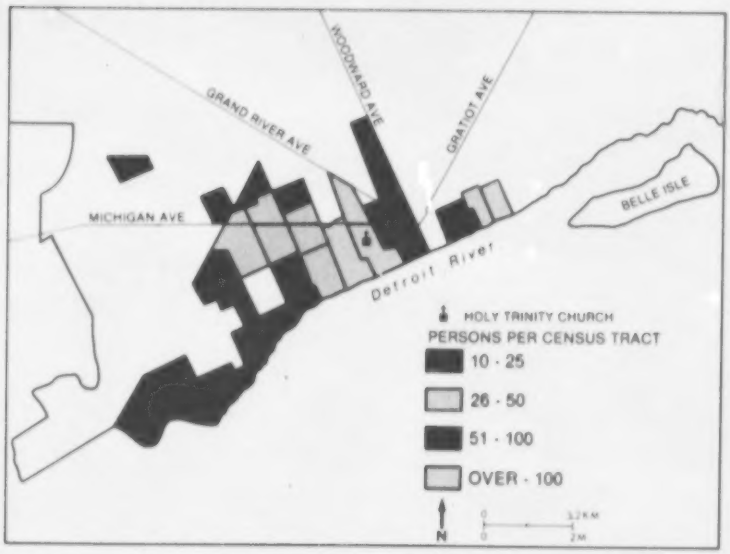


**Figure 39:** *Foreign Born Mexican Population in Census Tracts near Most Holy Trinity Church, 1940* [149]

Besides the church, another important factor in determining settlement sites of the foreign born Mexicans was the availability of jobs. Delray, in the extreme southwestern portion of Detroit also attracted sizeable numbers of Mexicans to work in the factories of the area.

Lesser, but significant numbers of the Mexican foreign born settled outside of the city limits near the Dodge Plant in Hamtramck, in south Dearborn near the Ford Rouge complex, and in the downriver communities of River Rouge, Ecorse, Wyandotte, and Lincoln Park where employment opportunities were numerous, particularly at the Great Lakes Steel Plant in River Rouge. (Figure 40)

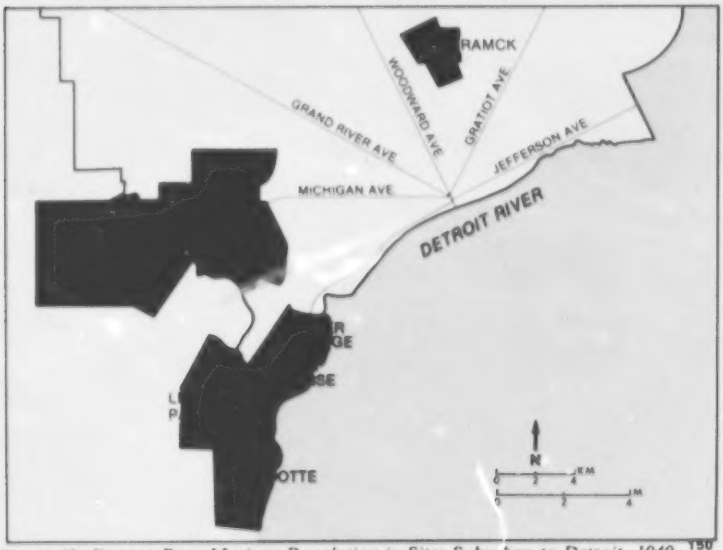


**Figure 40:** *Foreign Born Mexican Population in Sites Suburban to Detroit, 1940.* 150

This period before World War II was an era of contrasts for Mexicans. Some of the people of the Colonia seemed to suffer from a decreased sense of their cultural heritage. There were several reasons for this: 1) nearly two-thirds of the foreign born Mexicans in the area were males and their rate of marriage with non-Mexican women was relatively high; 2) continued discrimination against Mexicans caused many of them to avoid close ties with their ethnic background; 3) Mexicans in large cities like Detroit learned to understand and live with other ethnic minorities present in their environment and to make ad-

justments as necessary, and 3) the Cardinal who was Archbishop of Detroit from 1937 to 1958 "adhered to the policy that all people be Americanized and dictated that no special recognition or consideration be given to the Mexican community".[151]

Despite these obstacles, however, most Mexicans continued to exhibit a pride in their ethnic heritage; thus, the Mexican community quickly regained the vitality and strength it had displayed before the Depression, although it was never again to be as large.

Radiating from the center of the barrio near Most Holy Trinity, the streets were filled with signs advertising Mexican restaurants, doctors, grocery and meat markets, tortilla factories, bars, drugstores, and other businesses supplying the needs of the Colonia. Although most of the second generation Mexican-Americans were considered by the "Ancianos" (old ones) to be as "modern as Broadway," many of the older residents spoke only Spanish and the sound of the musical language filled the streets.

Fiestas were a regular occurrence; weddings, first communions, birthdays, and anniversaries were celebrated in the traditional Mexican fashion by the strongly family-oriented members of the community. The outward manifestations of their ethnic background — the Mariachi bands; the Mexican Hat Dance; the tortillas, tacos, and frijoles; the breaking of the pinatas at Christmas time; the beautiful native costumes — quickly became such an important part of the community at large, that today one cannot envision a Detroit without its Mexican festivals and restaurants.

As time passed, Corktown, like many other ethnic neighborhoods began to feel the effects of 'progress.' The area became a hodge-podge of factories, unattractive and abandoned commercial buildings, and empty or substandard houses, many of which had been built before the turn of the century.

Despite the strong efforts of the individuals of the Colonia, Mexican property owners were faced with accelerated neighborhood deterioration which soon resulted in a "no-win" situation. As buildings were abandoned and the tax base began to evaporate, the city instituted what residents called a "no taxes-no service" policy which hastened the physical decline of the barrio.[152]

In 1940, for the first time, census statistics became available by tracts, making it possible to determine more exactly, the settlement sites in which ethnic groups were concentrated. These statistics were used as the base for the computer-drawn map of foreign born Mexican concentrations in the Detroit metropolitan area in 1940. (Figure 41)

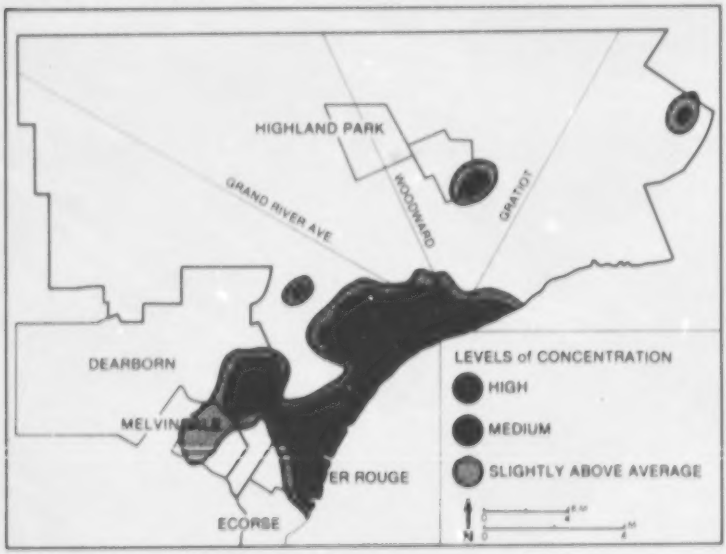


**Figure 41:** *Concentrations of Foreign Born Mexicans, Detroit Metropolitan Area, 1940.*[153]

It is clear that most foreign born Mexicans lived within the city limits of Detroit, primarily in the area from Mt. Elliot on the near east side to about Central Avenue on the west side, bounded on the south by the Detroit River and on the north by the present Edsel Ford Freeway. Smaller clusters were located in the southwestern panhandle of Detroit, with some spill-over into the neighboring cities of Dearborn and Melvindale. A group in the Delray area of southwest Detroit extended downriver into River Rouge and Ecorse. A small concentration occurred near the juncture of Harper and Van Dyke Streets on the east side, with a relatively minor cluster on the far east side of the city where it borders on Grosse Pointe Woods.

In 1970, there were 2,914 foreign born Mexicans in the City of Detroit according to the census, but the Mexican community

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and many authorities believe this to be a serious undercount of the actual Mexican population. Nevertheless, these statistics showed that their settlement pattern in the southwest Detroit area had remained relatively stable, although the extreme eastern portion of the 1940 settlement had shifted westward. (Figure 42)

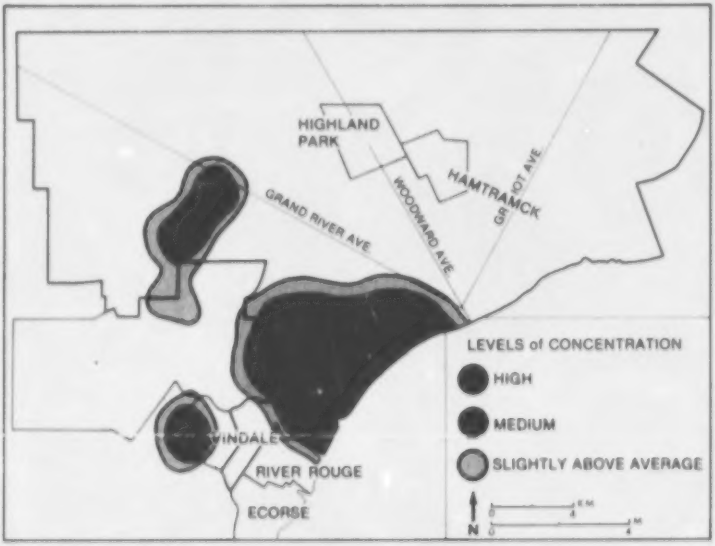


**Figure 42:** *Concentration of Foreign Born Mexicans, Detroit Metropolitan Area, 1970.*[154]

Considerable extension of the barrio in the vicinity of Springwells and Vernor Highway on the west side was evident and there had been some movement northward beyond the Ford Freeway. Although there was still some spill-over into River Rouge and south Dearborn, the Melvindale concentration was the one which had become more defined.

In 1970, the east side settlement sites had virtually disappeared, but a new site was evident on the west side of Detroit between Wyoming and Southfield, stretching from Lyndon on the north, southward across the city limits into Dearborn. By this time, also, several other areas in the seven county region surrounding Detroit[155] had become important settlement sites for the foreign born Mexicans. (Figure 43)

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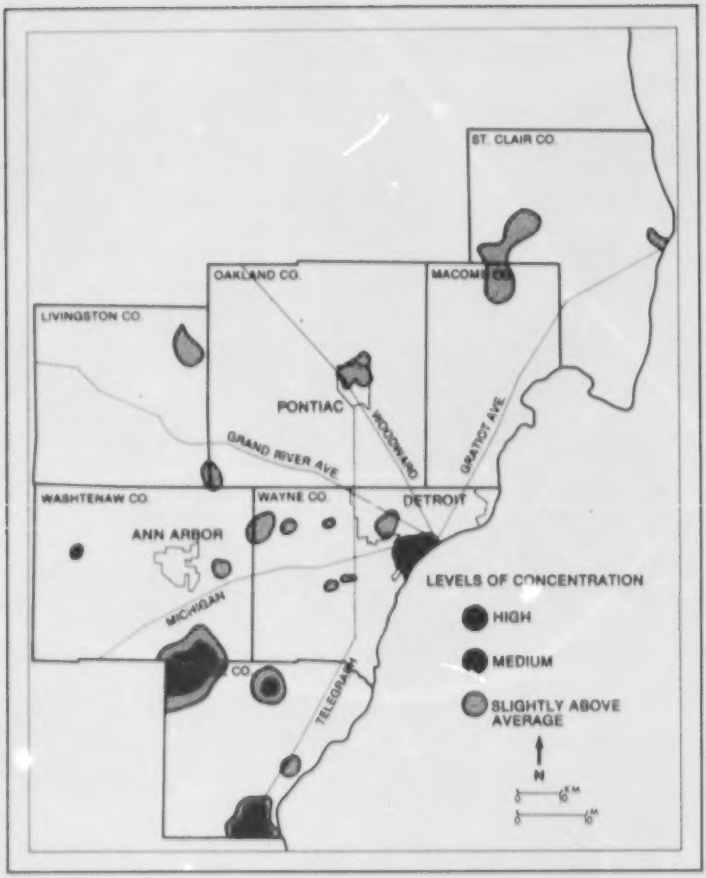


**Figure 43:** *Concentrations of Foreign Born Mexicans, 7 County Region, 1970*[158]



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A word of explanation is needed to clarify this illustration. Since the shaded areas represent concentrations of people, where population densities are great, such as in the city, a high concentration also indicates large numbers of Mexicans. In rural areas, where population densities are relatively light, the high concentrations may represent smaller actual numbers of people who are, however, clustered in the designated areas.

The map reveals that in 1970, the foreign born continued to be highly concentrated in the southwestern portion of Wayne County with settlements in the Tireman-Greenfield-Grand River section of Detroit as well as in the southwestern part of the city, extending into Dearborn and the downriver communities. We can also see that communities of foreign born Mexicans had become apparent in Redford and Plymouth in Wayne Country, while Monroe County had several noticeable settlement sites, with the highest density in the City of Monroe.

The community around Erie and Luna Pier was probably an extension of the Toledo, Ohio settlement and a prominent cluster was located in the northwest corner of Monroe County, extending from Milan in Washtenaw County. Another settlement of foreign born Mexicans was evident in the Ypsilanti area. Although concentrations in the other counties were not heavy, relatively important settlement sites became apparent around Pontiac in Oakland County and in the Armada-Capac area, covering both Macomb and St. Clair Counties. The nucleus of a concentration showed up in South Lyon in Oakland County and in the Hartland and Howell regions of Livingston County.

Most of these settlement sites were directly linked to the availability of industrial jobs in the region, although some of the outlying areas may have been remnants of rural settlements.

In actual numbers, the Detroit Colonia was the largest settlement of foreign born Mexicans in the seven country region in 1970.

A similar map of the native born of Mexican parentage, who will be called the second generation, provides some interesting comparisons. (Figure 44)

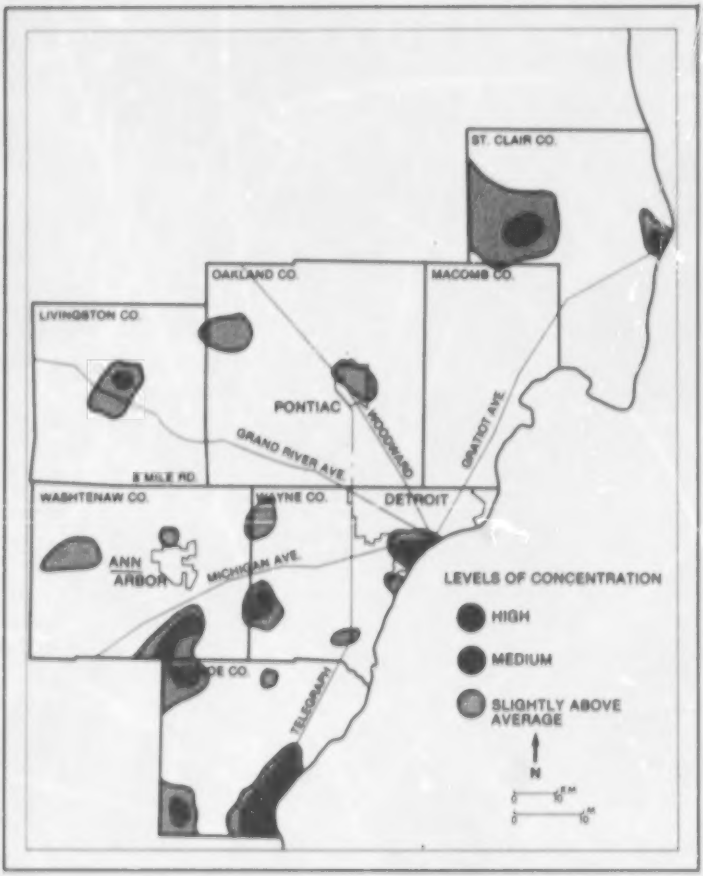


**Figure 44:** *Concentrations of Second Generation Mexican-Americans, 7 County Region Surrounding Detroit, 1970.* [187]

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We see that the second generation Mexican-Americans joined the foreign born in the southwestern section of Detroit as well as in the downriver communities; however, the Tireman-Greenfield-Grand River area did not attract them in significant numbers. A remarkable growth occurred in the Belleville area of Wayne County in which the foreign born were barely represented, and the second generation established communities in Taylor and Flat Rock and settled near the foreign born in the Plymouth area.

A definite growth pattern emerged in Monroe County where the second generation were settled in a dense concentration connecting the cities of Monroe, Erie, and Luna Pier with Toledo. A new settlement was evident in the Ottawa Lake region and the second generation were also found around Milan, as were their parents. Chelsea and Dexter in Washtenaw County showed the beginnings of settlements of the second-generation Mexicans who had also moved into the area around Holly in eastern Oakland county, just west of the Hartland site favored by the foreign born. The younger generation also followed the original settlers into the Howell region in substantial numbers. In 1970, there were no concentrations of Mexican-Americans large enough to show up on the map of Macomb County; however, the Capac-Emmet area of St. Clair county had attracted important numbers of them, as had Marysville.

Although the maps are based on the 1970 Census and changes will no doubt be recorded when the Census is taken in 1980, it can generally be concluded that second generation Mexican-Americans tended to settle near job opportunities and in most cases, in or near the original sites settled by the foreign born. It is also interesting to note that they were found in significant numbers in various locations throughout all the counties with the exception of Macomb County.

Despite this wide dispersion of Mexican-Americans throughout the region, it is the area in Detroit from the Ambassador Bridge to Springwells, bounded on the north by Vernor Highway and on the south by the River which is commonly known as the 'barrio' (neighborhood) even though the Mexican population actually constitutes an ethnic minority within this

geographical area. A definite Mexican flavor is reflected in the Mexican names on store fronts, and in numerous restaurants, bars, gift shops and bakeries.

Special services for the Spanish speaking are provided in area Catholic parishes, including Most Holy Trinity, St. Gabriel's, Holy Redeemer, St. Anne's, and St. Bernadette's as well as by Baptist, Pentecostal, Assembly of God and other Protestant churches. The Bowen Library on Vernor Highway provides a special Spanish language section and, after years of struggle on the part of Colonia residents, several public schools provide bilingual education for their children.

Besides fraternal, religious, cultural and patriotic groups whose origins date back to the 1920's, many new organizations have been formed to serve the needs of Detroit's Mexican-Americans. These include professional and trade groups, service organizations, and performing arts groups as well as social, athletic, and political clubs. With several local radio and television programs, the Colonia is one of the most highly organized ethnic communities in the city.[158] [159]

Mention must also be made of the viable and closely knit settlements in Ecorse and Wyandotte where Mexican-Americans play a prominent role in civic life. These communities have supplied a cadre of Mexicans who received leadership training and experience in the Steel Workers' Union of the Great Lakes Steel Corporation and have been able to contribute their talents and expertise to encourage entrance into the leadership ranks by union members throughout the Colonia.

A growing sense of political awareness among Detroit's Colonia has resulted in the appointment or election of several Mexican-Americas to positions of authority on local, state, and federal levels while the importance of the community's support and voting strength has been recognized by most candidates in recent elections.

Discrimination, both obvious and subtle, still exists to plague Mexicans and their children; fortunately, it has generally had the positive effect of encouraging self-help action programs and education as the means for entering the socio-economic main stream.

The progress which had been made on the educational front is evident when 1970 census statistics are examined. (Figure 45)

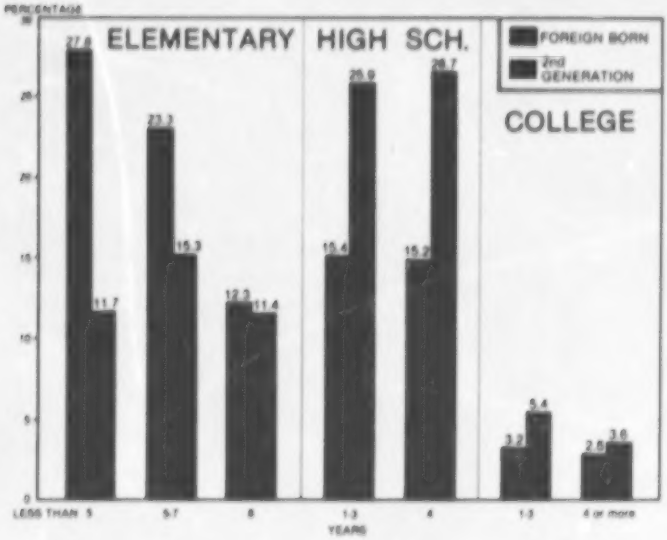


**Figure 45**: *Years of School Completed by Foreign Born and Second Generation Mexicans, 25 Years and Older, Detroit Metropolitan Area, 1970* [180]

While almost 28% of the foreign born Mexicans had less than 5 years of schooling, that figure dropped to less than 12% in the second generation. At the same time, almost 27% of the second generation had completed high school as compared to 15% among the foreign born. It is interesting to note, however, that the differences are not as great in the college group. While 3.6% of the second generation completed 4 or more years of college, almost 3% of the foreign born had accomplished the same goal.

Educational statistics are quite revealing when the status of foreign born and second generation women is examined. With those born in Mexico, they fell behind the men in each category without exception; however, in the second generation, the situa-

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tion changed somewhat with women taking over the lead in both the completion of high school and 4 or more years of college.

These educational statistics become even more significant when the occupational status of Mexican-Americans in 1970 are examined. (Figure 46)

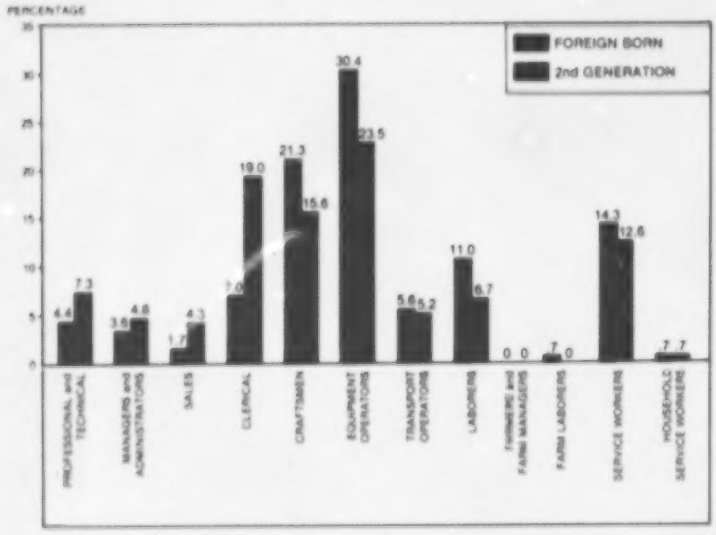


**Figure 46:** *Occupations of Foreign Born and Second Generation Mexicans, 16 Years and Older, Detroit Metropolitan Area, 1970* [101]

The largest number of workers by far, in both the foreign born and second generations were in the operative category, which includes operators of all kinds of machines except transport equipment. More than 30% of the foreign born fell into this category while in the second generation, the figure was 23.5%. Craftsmen accounted for some 21% of the foreign born workers but in the second generation, this fell to 15.6%, a decline which is evident in almost every ethnic group. Mexicans showed substantial increases in the second generation in the



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clerical, sales, managers, and professional categories when compared to the foreign born, which probably reflects the increase in the number of high school and college graduates.

Mexican-American women showed a significant gain in the professional category. While there were no professionals among the foreign born women, there were 152 professionals among the second generation. This figure, which was only one less than the number of professional second generation males and accounts for more than 10% of the females tabulated, was directly related to their educational achievements. As in most ethnic groups, the category accounting for the largest number of female workers in both the foreign born and second generation was clerical, with almost one-third of the total. Household workers, farmers, and farm laborers were almost non-existant among Mexicans in general when compared to the total occupation picture.

The direct result of the kinds of jobs held, of course, is the income derived from those occupations. (Figure 47)

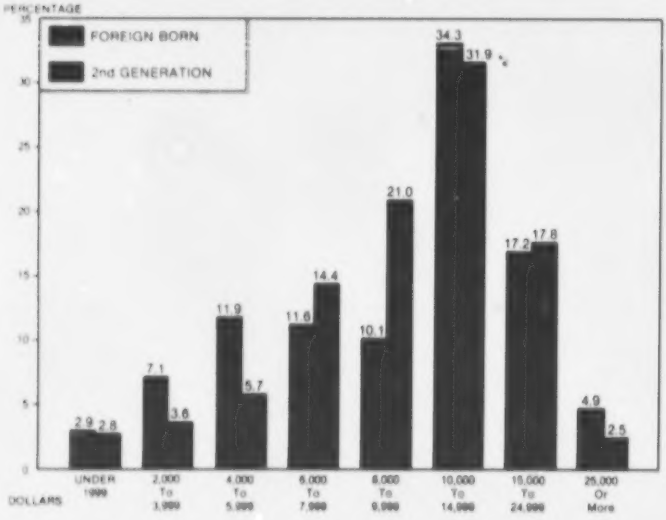


**Figure 47:** *Family Income for Foreign Born and Second Generation Mexicans, Detroit Metropolitan Area, 1970.* [182]



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It is extremely interesting to note that 4.9% of the foreign born were in the $25,000 or more category compared to only 2.5% in the second generation. In most other ethnic groups, the situation is reversed.

While it is difficult to be certain of the reason for this phenomenon, it is reasonable to assume that although there are 7.3% professionals among the second generation as compared to 4.4% among the foreign born, the foreign born have either been in their professions longer, resulting in higher salaries, or their ranks have been augmented by newcomers from Mexico in the higher salaried professions. The foreign born also lead the second generation in two other relatively high-paying categories, craftsmen and operatives.

The percentages in the under $1,999 category were virtually the same for both groups, but there were more foreign born in the $2,000-$3,900 and $4,000-$5,999 categories. In the categories from $10,000-$14,999 and $15,000-$24,999 the percentages for both generations were also almost the same. Thus, it is probably the greater number of forign born Mexicans in the over $25,000 group which accounted for the fact that the median income for the foreign born of $10,934 was slightly higher than the median for the second generation which was $10,348. These figures compare favorably with the median income of the foreign born of all countries ($11,474) and to that of all native born of native parentage, which was $11,824 per year. In fact in 1970, the median income of Mexican foreign born was higher than that of the foreign born from Italy, Greece, USSR, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Norway and Ireland.

The reasons for this can only be surmised, but probably a steady influx of foreign born Mexicans with professions or highly paid skills is one factor.

In addition, some Mexicans who reach retirement age and are forced to live on fixed incomes, return to their homeland where living expenses are lower.

Another relevant factor, of course, is age. (Figure 48)

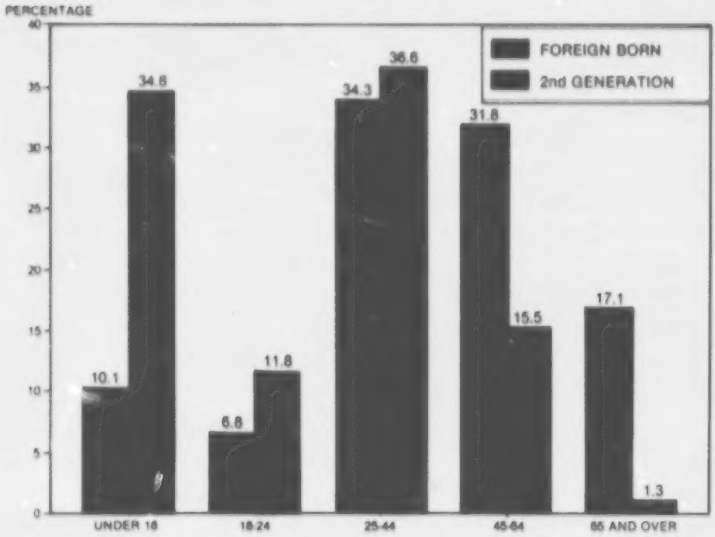


**Figure 48:** *Age Distribution of the Foreign Born and Second Generation Mexican Population, Detroit Metropolitan Area, 1970* [183]

Foreign born Mexican males were generally much younger than those of other ethnic groups, with only 19.2% in the over 65 year old category. Only the Chinese, Cuban, West Indian, and Central and South American foreign born males had lower percentages in this age group. On the other hand, the average percentage of foreign born males over 65 years of age from Italy, Greece, USSR, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Norway, and Ireland was 49.6%. Since many in this age category are retired on fixed incomes, this would partially account for the higher median income of the Mexican foreign born. While the percentage of families with incomes below the poverty level was less among foreign born Mexicans than in many other ethnic groups, it was considerably higher in the second generation when they were compared to the other ethnic groups.

In comparing foreign born Mexicans to second generation Mexican-Americans, we find that 73% of the foreign born were in the prime earning years of 18-64, while only 64% of the se-

cond generation fell into this category. This may account for the fact that the earnings for the foreign born were slightly higher than those for the second generation. In addition, the second generation had almost 35% in the under 18 year old category, which is generally non-income producing, while the figure for the foreign born was only 10%.

While many of the other countries of the world, particularly in Europe, no longer provide great numbers of immigrants to the United States, immigration from Mexico is the highest of any ethnic group and continues on the rise. Thus, the importance of Mexican-Americans, their education, their occupations, and their earnings has, and will continue to have, enormous impact on the overall socio-economic picture of the nation, the state, and especially the Detroit area.

Beginning in the 1960's a renewed sense of ethnic identity began to emerge among the residents of the Detroit Colonia. Examples provided by Martin Luther King, Cesar Chavez, and young Chicanos in the southwest filled many Mexicans in the Detroit area with a sense of pride and mission, providing them with the impetus for dealing with social conditions in their own community.

A revived interest in the Spanish language has resulted in bilingual education for Mexican children and many social service agencies in Detroit have bilingual staff members. To provide more teachers and social workers who are sensitive to the Mexican experience, more and more children of the Colonia are being encouraged to attend local universities. Political awareness remains on the upswing and the Colonia is well aware of the importance of its collective voting power.

Although discrimination in all of its forms has by no means disappeared, conditions for the most part, have improved in the last decade. Even urban blight, which has affected the physical location of the Colonia, has not eradicated the sense of unity within the Mexican-American community, no matter how dispersed its members might be.

Surmounting the obstacles which discrimination and neglect have placed in their way, the people of Mexican heritage move slowly but steadily toward full participation in the renaissance of the City of Detroit, and more particularly, to a brighter, more fulfilling future for themselves and their children.

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